

**An investigation into the effect of increased tuition fees on the  
attitudes and opinions of UK academic library staff towards their  
customers and their roles.**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore what effect increased tuition fees have had on the attitudes and opinions of UK academic library staff towards their customers and their roles. The project set out to obtain library staff opinions about students being considered consumers, and explore whether Library Managers have implemented any changes to their services or strategy as a result of the increased tuition fees. Furthermore, the research aimed to discover whether library staff feel their roles and working life have been influenced by the increased tuition fees, and whether library managers are responsive to any impact the increased tuition fees have had on their staff.

A mixed-methods research strategy was used. This comprised four qualitative semi-structured interviews with Library Managers, and two qualitative focus groups with Library Assistants. Participants also completed a quantitative demographic questionnaire.

It was discovered that library staff felt some students had adopted a consumer mindset towards universities and their libraries due to increased fees. Resource provision, facilities and opening hours were common areas where expectations had increased. Library staff revealed mixed attitudes towards students in this context. Participants cared about providing excellent library services to meet their users' needs, and sympathised with the financial pressures facing students; nonetheless concerns were raised that students have an increasing sense of entitlement, and that accepting a "consumer" view of students could damage libraries' educational purpose.

It was found that student recruitment, student experience, and graduate employability were priorities for universities in the context of increased fees. In libraries, common responses were renovation of facilities, extended opening hours, extra investment in resources, and an increased focus on NSS results. However, tuition fees were not the only factor affecting academic libraries and their staff; other influences included pedagogical styles, technological developments, and the growth of e-resources.

## **DECLARATION**

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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## **STATEMENT 1**

This work is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, then extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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## **List of abbreviations used**

APA	American Psychological Association
BSA	British Sociological Association
CILIP	Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
CSE	Customer Service Excellence
DIS	Department of Information Studies
LISA	Library and Information Science Abstracts
LUPC	London Universities Purchasing Consortium
MCLIP	Membership of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
NSS	National Student Survey
OA	Open Access.
PRES	Postgraduate Research Experience Survey
PTES	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
SCONUL	Society of College, National and University Libraries
SUPC	Southern Universities Purchasing Consortium

UCU	University and College Union
VAT	Value Added Tax
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

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Finally, I am very grateful to the participants who gave up their time to be involved in this study, and showed such enthusiasm about my topic.

# 1. Introduction

## *1.1 Purpose and background of the dissertation*

In the academic year 2012-13, university tuition fees in England rose to £9,000 per year. The researcher works in an academic library, and was conscious that fees have been a cause for concern within the library profession. The premise of this dissertation was therefore to investigate how library staff have been affected by and reacted to the tuition fees increase. After a literature review (see chapter 2), the following research aim, questions and objectives were formulated:

## *1.2 Research aim*

To explore what effect increased tuition fees have had on the attitudes and opinions of UK academic library staff towards their customers and their roles.

## *1.3 Research questions*

To:

- investigate whether, in the current higher education climate, UK academic library staff view students as “consumers”.
- investigate whether Library Managers and Library Assistants share the same perceptions of students in this context.

## *1.4 Research objectives*

To:

1. obtain library staff opinions about students being considered consumers.
2. explore whether Library Managers have implemented any changes to their services or strategy, as a result of the increased tuition fees.
3. discover whether library staff feel their roles and working life have been influenced by the increased tuition fees.

4. discover whether library managers are responsive to any impact the increased tuition fees have had on their staff.

### *1.5 Scope of the dissertation*

Tuition fees have been a “hot topic” in the UK news and in the librarianship literature, so this dissertation contributes to a subject of contemporary interest.

The results presented in this dissertation are based on interviews, focus groups and questionnaires carried out with Library Managers and Library Assistants at four universities in London and Southern England during autumn 2014. The project was subject to geographical and time constraints; however, all possible effort was made to involve participants from a variety of settings.

### *1.6 Structure of the dissertation*

#### Chapter 1: Introduction

#### Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter explores current professional literature on the topics in question. Key themes are the growing sense that students are now “consumers” in the higher education marketplace, the higher expectations placed on library services, and the increased emphasis on performance measurement.

#### Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter the research design - four qualitative semi-structured interviews with Library Managers, and two qualitative focus groups with Library Assistants – is explained and justified. Limitations of the study are discussed.

#### Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the study's results. Notable findings are students' increased confidence in expressing their expectations from library services, participants' mixed attitudes towards students in the context of increased fees, and common changes to library services including renovation and extended opening hours.

#### Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter compares the results to the existing literature. Many points of correlation are found.

#### Chapter 6: Conclusion

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the current state of professional literature relating to the research topic. The areas examined are:

- The current higher education climate
- Library services, customers and consumers
- Performance measurement
- Library staff in a changing environment.

The focus of this project will be on the situation in UK academic libraries since £9,000 fees were introduced in 2012. However, as there has not been time for a full picture to emerge of the impact of this, it would have been limiting to include only texts with this exact focus. Consequently texts predicting possible implications of £9,000 fees prior to their introduction, as well as literature from the UK between 1998 and 2012 (when fees were in place but lower) and from the USA (where fees are an ongoing concern) were also used. Similarly, for general topics such as customer service, literature from various library sectors worldwide has been consulted in addition to works focusing on UK academic libraries. The origins of texts used are signposted.

### 2.2 Literature review strategy

The main sources for finding books were Aberystwyth University's *Primo* catalogue (Aberystwyth University, 2014d), and University of Reading's *Enterprise* catalogue (University of Reading Library, 2014). For journal articles *Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA)*, *Education Resource Complete* and *British Education Index* were used. Newspapers including the *Times Educational Supplement* were another source. The search terms are listed in Appendix 1. Some terms were combined with Boolean operators to increase the relevance of the results retrieved. For example: "*Student expectations AND academic librar\**". Sometimes results were limited by date to reflect recent events such as the introduction of £9,000 fees. Further sources were identified by "chaining" from bibliographies (Foster, 2004).



### *2.3. The current higher education climate*

Before focusing on the UK academic library climate, it is necessary to observe the trends influencing higher education globally.

#### *2.3.1 Global trends*

An important recent development has been the increasing availability of distance and e-learning, facilitated by technological advances. Technologies which aid distance education include Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) (Hawkrige & Wheeler, 2010; Lentell, 2012) and Second Life (Hawkrige & Wheeler, 2010). E-learning's growth is causing a diversification of student bodies because it accommodates work and family commitments of mature students (Flavián, Longás & Lozano, 2013, p. 70). Strategically, this trend is important to universities. As Lentell states, "[w]hat attracts the new advocates [of distance education] is that students do not have to be full-time, will pay fees – high fees perhaps – will not demand much in terms of campus services and may well live overseas" (2012, p. 23).

Another impact has been the explosion of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which are affiliated to elite universities but freely accessible to anyone. Wright describes MOOCs as "a potent defence against the rising cost and insular culture of attending a traditional college" (Wright, 2013). This is echoed by Massis (2013) and Wu, who writes "[t]he MOOC movement, when scaled up, has the potential to create a borderless "global campus" with a multitude of distributed yet connected learning communities that anyone (with Internet access) can be part of" (2013, p. 579). The full implications of MOOCs remain to be seen.

#### *2.3.2 Changes affecting academic libraries*

Higher education institutions operate in a turbulent climate, driven by technological change, as do their libraries. Walker describes the academic library climate as "fundamentally re-shaped by changes in information-seeking behaviors [sic], scholarly communications, information technology, pedagogical practices, interdisciplinary approaches to scholarship, as well as the global economic downturn" (2011, p. 7). In the

UK, Hurst (2013) similarly notes the challenges of accommodating changing pedagogical styles and technological expectations.

There literature emphasises the impact of e-resources on physical library use, for example falling gate-counts, decreased circulation, and fewer enquiries (Gayton, 2008; Hurst, 2013; Woodward, 2009). Another influence on academic libraries is the arrival of “Net Generation” students, who are “technologically savvy and wanting results instantly” (Ismail, 2010, p. 11) and consequently have higher expectations than their predecessors. A common expectation is for information resources to be effortlessly available through VLEs (Hurst, 2013, p. 402-3; Roberts, 2005, p. 3.4). Due to these changes and the growth of pedagogical practices emphasising group work (Gayton, 2008, p. 61), evidence is emerging of libraries being re-designed as “information commons” which integrate traditional library services with classrooms, cafés and IT support (Gayton, 2008; Hurst 2013; Pulliam, 2012; Woodward, 2009). This phenomenon divides opinions. Pulliam notes positively that “control now lies with the student. They can readily create their own experiences in the library by choosing from a variety of study and workspaces” (2012, p. 37). Contrastingly, Gayton criticises the social style, suggesting the reason students come to libraries is “seeing and being seen by others, quietly engaged in the same serious, studious activity” (2008, p. 60).

The impact of the global economic downturn on library budgets is also prevalent in the literature (Broady-Preston & Lobo, 2011; Harper & Corral, 2011; Hurst, 2013; Priestner & Tilley, 2012b; Town, 2011). Hurst describes the challenge “to expand services and increase user satisfaction with budgets which in real terms are static or decreasing” (2013, p. 403). Resource costs, such as the serials crisis and Value Added Tax (VAT) on e-resources factor heavily in this problem (Harper & Corral, 2011, p. 100). Furthermore, libraries are staff-intensive organisations, which is challenging to maintain: the literature reveals that hiring freezes (Harper & Corral, 2011, p. 108) and reductions in professional posts (Hurst, 2013, p. 404) are common.

### *2.3.3 The UK Higher Education climate*

Having observed global influences on higher education and academic libraries, let us explore the current situation in the UK, which has been irrevocably influenced by the

increase of tuition fees in England to £9,000 in 2012-13. Tuition fees were introduced in 1998, and increased to £3,000 with “top-up fees” in 2006 (“Tuition fees”, n.d.). The increase to £9,000 is not simply a case of universities attempting to make money, but to offset government funding cuts (“Q&A”, 2011). Nonetheless, evidence is emerging that higher fees are propagating a view among universities and students themselves that students are now *consumers* in the higher education *market* (Abrams, 2014; Bickley & Corral, 2011; Coughlan, 2011; Coward, 2013; Grove, 2014; Sellgren, 2014). Before the introduction of £9,000 fees, Coughlan (2011) warned:

“The market economy in higher education will mean students have to be treated as valuable customers... Are universities going to be selling lifestyle and leisure experience as much as the old-fashioned currency of learning? No one wants to see universities end up as expensive academic theme parks” (para. 4).

Post-2012 reports indicate that, as predicted, an increased consumer mentality among students is emerging. A recent study found that one third of students in England considered their courses “poor” or “very poor” value-for-money, with criticisms including low contact hours and large classes; tellingly satisfaction is higher among Scottish students, who pay no fees (Sellgren, 2014). Similarly, Abrams (2014) reports that complaints to universities increased 10% between 2010-11 and 2012-13. Concerns are raised that marketisation and consumerism could lower university standards and erode the ideals of higher education (Coughlan, 2011; Coward, 2013). One example is University of Surrey’s decision to evaluate lecturers’ performance via student questionnaires, which has angered the University and College Union (UCU): “It’s quite scary – it’s not about educating students, but pleasing them” (Fidler, as cited in Grove, 2014, para. 9).

#### *2.4 Library services, customers and consumers*

Let us examine possible implications for academic libraries if, as suggested, students begin to consider themselves “customers” and “consumers”.

##### *2.4.1 Consumer expectations and the academic library*

The increase to £9,000 fees may result in heightened customer expectations; certainly, this was observed following previous increases. As early as 2000 it was stated:

“Today’s UK students pay fees and expect value for money. Some expect to be spoon-fed information. They are part of the consumerist society that demands instant gratification. Consequently they have unrealistic expectations of what their library staff should provide; expecting access to print copies of all core texts whenever they choose to ask for them” (Dugdale, as cited in Matthews, 2002, p. 9).

Likewise following top-up fees, librarians noted students having “a different way of looking at the university experience from that of students only a few years ago... students expect more choice now and more personalised services” (Sykes, 2007, p. 24).

However compelling the influence of fees, this is not the only factor in students’ increasing demands. As noted above, Net Generation students have higher expectations regarding technology. Sykes also observes that today’s students belong to a culture in which self-expression of feelings through social media or reality TV is commonplace, so they may be vocal in airing complaints (2007, p. 24). Furthermore, increased expectations are not unique to universities: Gannon-Leary and McCarthy observe increased consumer mentality, expectations of 24-hour service, and desire for value-for-money in all library sectors and view this as a societal trend (2010, p. 183).

#### *2.4.2 Customer service in libraries*

If library users increasingly view themselves as “customers” and “consumers”, let us explore the professional literature relating to customer service. In this section literature from all library sectors worldwide is used.

The importance of customer service is emphasised in the literature. Corrall’s states “[c]ustomer service... is at the heart of what we do and why we exist – our purpose and mission – and it is the means by which we move our organizations forward. Customer services must drive library and information policy and planning” (2002, p. 27), a sentiment echoed by many others (Bernstein, 2008; Gorman, 2000; Priestner & Tilley, 2012b; Rowley, 1996). It is clear that in the digital age libraries cannot neglect customer service assuming that users have no alternative to their service: “[t]olerance for inadequate, poor or incomplete service in today’s society is very low. If you don’t deliver your services in a way that makes your customers feel they are appreciated and valued, then they will go elsewhere” (McKinlay & Williamson, 2010, p. 227), a point echoed by Gannon-Leary and McCarthy (2010, p. 32).

Todaro and Smith define customer service as:

“more than just smiling at the public or greeting everyone who comes through the door. Good customer service is the total relationship between the library and the library user. It includes not only courtesy but also such key elements as technical skills, thoroughness, follow-through, dependability, and consistency. Should workers fall down in one or more of these skills, it really does not matter how nice they are to the customer; the customer may leave disappointed with the service in your library” (2006, p. 105-6).

Essentially, customer service relates to the library’s ability to meet the needs and expectations of its users, and pervades the actions of the whole organisation. This cannot be achieved in isolated occurrences but requires input from all staff members, who must be aware of the library’s mission and their role in achieving it (Bernstein, 2008; Rowley, 1996; Todaro & Smith, 2006).

#### *2.4.3 Marketing, segmentation and the boutique approach*

Literature from various sectors and countries indicates that to meet the needs and expectations of users who view themselves as consumers, libraries must be customer-focused in their service design. The idea that customers deserve input in shaping services is commonly expressed (Broady-Preston & Lobo, 2011; Corral, 2002, p. 31-2; Gent & Kempster, 2002, p. 66; Rowley, 1996, p. 32; Todaro & Smith, 2006, p. 18) with Hernon and Altman stating: “the people who interact with any library service are the reason for the organization’s existence. Therefore their needs and desires should drive the service” (2010, p. 3).

This links to the idea of marketing, “the management process which identifies, anticipates, and supplies customer requirements” (The Chartered Institute of Marketing, as cited in De Saez, 2002, p. 1), which many authors recommend for providing customer-focused service (Germano, 2010; Singh, 2009; Thompson, 2012; West, 2002). An essential element in marketing is segmentation, the process of identifying different types of users and their needs (Broady-Preston & Lobo, 2011; McKnight, 2009; Woodward, 2009), the benefits of which are summarised as follows:

“If we can identify characteristics that identify different public groupings, we can plan accordingly to meet actual and potential needs... This involves being able to understand customers’ needs and behaviours in order to categorise them more effectively, to offer them the right service at the right time, but above all, to persuade that that the service they are offered is adapted to their needs and is the ideal solution” (Gannon-Leary & McCarthy, 2010, p. 29).

A related concept is the “boutique” approach, recommended in Priestner and Tilley’s book (2012c) for meeting academic library users’ expectations. A “boutique” library service focuses on delivering what customers value and offering specific rather than generic services (Priestner & Tilley, 2012b, p. 6). Users are offered convenience and autonomy, for example a wide range of opening hours and study spaces (Pulliam, 2012, p. 42). This service model is important for academic libraries because “in today’s world, the individual is ‘king’, has higher expectations of service, expects their voice to be heard and responded to” (Priestner & Tilley, 2012b, p. 3).

#### *2.4.4 Accommodating customers’ needs and expectations in academic libraries*

Let us explore the literature about what academic library users’ needs and expectations are, and practical suggestions for accommodating these in a climate of increasing consumer mindsets. Although written prior to the 2012 fees increase, McKnight’s (2008) article thoroughly assesses academic library users’ expectations. Through research comparing the UK and Australia, the author establish users’ core priorities as: appropriate library space, core text availability, competent library staff, appropriate opening hours, and effective communication of the library’s services through websites, signage and guiding (McKnight, 2009, p. 617-8).

There are many suggestions of practical ways to meet expectations in the “consumer” age. One clear cross-sectoral theme is that libraries must abandon the stance that they provide a fixed service, so users should come to them and obey their rules: instead, libraries should make efforts to welcome users and accommodate their lifestyles. For example, Thompson (2012) and Todaro and Smith (2006) encourage libraries to communicate in positive rather than authoritarian language, for example “Quiet zone” rather than “No talking” signs because “These are benefits to the users, not a list of dos and don’ts” (Thompson, 2012, p. 159). Essentially, the task for today’s academic libraries is:

“making concessions to students’ lifestyles. They should create spaces where the use of mobile phones is not just tolerated but positively encouraged... [and] how about allowing some eating and drinking at least in certain areas of the library?” (Sykes, 2007, p. 30).

## *2.5 Performance measurement in academic libraries*

The consumer mentality emerging in UK higher education has caused increased focus on performance measurement, the most prevalent measurement being the National Student Survey (NSS). Before focusing on the NSS, let us broadly examine performance measurement in academic libraries worldwide.

### *2.5.1 Background to performance measurement in academic libraries*

There are many methods for measuring academic libraries' performance. The literature reveals a global picture of league tables, performance indicators, benchmarking, user satisfaction surveys, LibQual+; and UK-specific methods such as the SCONUL survey template, the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) award and the NSS (Broady-Preston & Lobo, 2011; Creaser, 2006; Hurst, 2013). Performance measurement has been part of librarianship for decades, but since 1990s the focus has shifted from statistical measurements towards user satisfaction surveys (Esson, Stevenson, Gildea, & Roberts, 2012, p. 470).

Gent and Kempster observe that an increase in survey activities is a trend in the information society as "the democratization of knowledge, affects all areas of public service. The burgeoning of focus groups, referenda and consultation are all attempts to engage and involve the customer in increasingly transparent business" (2002, p. 69). This sense of accountability and customer involvement is certainly a factor for academic libraries in an age of tight budgets, demanding customers, and a need to illustrate return on investment. In the UK context, user feedback is "ever more important in a market place increasingly driven by fees, graduate contributions and rising expectations that come with higher payments" (Young, 2011, p. 9). However, performance measurement based on user feedback is often criticised. Many authors question the usefulness of user surveys, because survey instruments frequently use tightly-structured closed questions preventing students from responding in their own words (McKnight, 2008, p. 614; Priestner, 2012, p. 20). Walters, in a discussion of LibQual+, questions whether user surveys should be given as much weight in evaluating library services as professionals' expertise:

“many services can be evaluated authoritatively only by respondents with significant research experience or professional expertise... many undergraduates have only limited familiarity with the universe of information – the range of resources that might potentially be useful to them. Without this familiarity, students cannot distinguish between high-quality service... and inadequate service” (2003, p. 99).

### *2.5.2 The National Student Survey*

The NSS is an evaluation of higher education institutions as a whole, using feedback from final-year undergraduates. The NSS began in 2005, intending to standardise the feedback gathered by UK universities, to allow nationwide comparison and inform prospective students (Richardson, Slater & Wilson, 2007). Articles such as Flint, Oxley, Helm and Bradley’s (2009) indicate that universities take the NSS seriously and are committed to scoring well against their competitors. However, the NSS has been criticised as “a simplistic device that is easy to outmanoeuvre” (Harvey, as cited in Curtis, 2008), with reports of students being threatened that poor feedback will make their qualifications appear less prestigious (Curtis, 2008), and suggestions that the NSS could be used to bully university staff (Sullivan, 2007, p. 19). Simply:

“the answer to the question of the value of the NSS is that it all depends... on the culture of the institution. Command and control cultures will use the NSS to fail; cultures of mutual support will keep moving forward” (Sullivan, 2007, p. 22).

### *2.5.3 Libraries and the National Student Survey*

The NSS features 2 library-related items:

- “16. The library resources and services are good enough for my needs”
- “17. I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to”<sup>1</sup> (Young, 2011).

Stanley’s research (2009) indicates that the NSS is given much attention, and is viewed as a positive force by librarians. Although Stanley’s methodology (an email to the LIS-SCONUL mailing list) was not the most systematic the responses reveal interesting uses of NSS data, for example using good results for publicity and poor results for funding bids (Stanley, 2009, p. 144-5). Furthermore, Young notes that NSS results provide “an opportunity to understand how students use library services and what they think of

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<sup>1</sup> Depending on the structure of each university, question 17 may or may not fall under the library’s remit.



them... and in particular which areas we could seek to improve upon in terms of assuring the relevance of our services” (2011, p. 10).

However Creaser (2006, p. 1), Stanley (2009, p. 146) and Young (2011, p. 9) note limitations of the NSS, for example the overly-general wording of the library question; consequently it is advised to triangulate NSS feedback against other performance measures. Nonetheless, the emphasis placed on the NSS by universities makes it an irremovable fixture for academic libraries: “[w]hat’s difference for us about the NSS (from our other feedback and benchmarking activities) is that the whole institution takes notice” (Young, 2011, p. 9). As both Stanley’s and Young’s articles were written prior to £9,000 tuition fees, the situation today may be more acute.

## *2.6 Library staff in a changing environment*

UK academic libraries face a complex environment, increasingly driven by performance measurement and accountability for providing value-for-money. The focus of this research will be the impact of this climate on academic library staff.

### *2.6.1 The vital role of library staff*

One might assume that due to self-service technology the value of library staff is diminishing, but instead there is a consensus in literature from all sectors that staff are vitally important in responding to today’s environment. Woodward writes “[c]entral to almost every library survival strategy is the library staff. It is only through their expertise and their interaction with customers that academic libraries can grow and prosper in the twenty-first century” (2009, p.152), with which McKinlay and Williamson (2010) and Tilley (2012) concur. Furthermore, Tilley warns that despite temptations to cut staffing when budgets are tight, “the damage that will be done to our services if we remove the human interaction with our staff will be extensive. The level of service that users are provided with by staff is a key measure of service quality” (2012, p. 170-1).

### *2.6.2 Attitudes of library staff towards service*

The literature gives some evidence of library workers' attitudes towards their customers and their roles, but mostly in the form of values statements and observations rather than actual evidence gathered from library staff.

Building on concepts including Ranganathan's *Five laws of library science*, Gorman (2000) attempts to define cross-sectoral core professional values of librarianship: "service" is first on his list. Gorman contends that library workers are by nature idealists, with a strong belief in their role in enabling others to flourish through education (2000, p.25). Historically, there is a sense of "higher values" about the service offered by library staff:

"the librarian has come to conceive his office as a secular priesthood, administering a sacrament of cultural communication to individual souls" (Butler, as cited in Gorman, 2000, p. 18).

In contrast to these idealistic statements, there are indications that the practical relationships of library staff to library users are more complex. This can be seen in attitudes towards terminology to describe library users. Thompson writes:

"To many people working in libraries 'customers' is a difficult word; 'users' perhaps has negative connotations around drug abuse; and the term 'patron', though common in the United States, does not have wide use and understanding in the United Kingdom. Many public and academic libraries use the term 'readers', although some use the term customers, but it has been a perennial problem in libraries (particularly in the UK)." (2012, p. 150).

### *2.6.3 Staff attitudes about whether library users are consumers*

There is only a little literature addressing library workers' feelings about changes affecting them since the introduction of £9,000 tuition fees, such as users being considered consumers, and the corresponding emphasis on performance measurement. Consequently, literature from earlier periods in the UK and from the USA is also used in this section.

Some UK authors fully accept the idea that academic library users are fee-paying consumers. Priestner and Tilley (2012b) reiterate that the user is "king", which justifies their suggestion of a "boutique" service driven by users' expectations. According to

Cutts, “Most library staff appreciate the professionally stimulating working environment that this approach creates. They enjoy the challenge of needing to be ‘on the ball’ in aiming to satisfy and anticipate different information needs” (2012, p. 59).

In any other situation it would be unquestioned that one who pays for a service is a customer, and that service providers should be subject to performance measurement. But there are suggestions in the literature that treating library users as consumers diminishes the values of librarianship. Gorman (2012, p. 15) criticises the notion that library services can be treated as a commodity, and in one of the few articles on this topic since the 2012 UK fees increase Hurst writes:

“Designating students as “customers” sets up the expectation of a transactional relationship, complete with a culture of standardised response which tends to discourage real staff engagement with users and ignores the human, personalised response which characterises the best customer service practice” (Hurst, 2013, p. 400).

Writing about “recruitment-driven” USA universities that rely on income from fees, Cottrell suggests that consumerism “changes the core mission of academia entirely” (2011, p. 121), noting that “Libraries and librarians are generally opposed to this profit-centred idea” (p. 119).

Some argue that objections to the idea that students are fee-paying consumers are a vestige of the patriarchal attitudes traditionally associated with librarianship. “[P]rofessionals have in the past been guilty of designing library services based on what they think customers need... deciding that customers do not always know what it is they want” (Esson et al., 2012 p. 470), and even in the twenty-first century hints of patriarchal attitudes persist in the literature (Gayton, 2008, p. 64; Gorman, 2012, p. 12). But others indicate it is because consumerism seems vulgar compared to the idealistic values attached to the educational role of libraries and to higher education:

“The aims of the academy and scholarship are transcendent, relying on a shared belief that there is an impact through higher education on individuals and society, and beyond that there is a value arising from being educated, which relates in a fundamental way to human flourishing. This has always been difficult to quantify” (Town, 2011, p. 112).

#### *2.6.4 Staff development in libraries*

It is clear from the general literature on library staffing that to effectively respond to periods of challenge (such as the heightened expectations currently facing UK academic libraries), significant investment in staff training and development is needed (Matthews, 2002, p. 20; McKinlay & Williamson, 2010). As Tilley states, “staff talents and skills are one of the most valuable resources of the organisation, and focusing on constantly improving these will further enhance the service” (Tilley, 2012, p. 175). There are reminders in the literature that staff development need not be expensive: much can be achieved through talks and newsletters, for which the main cost is time investment (Todaro & Smith, 2006, p. 20; Davis & Lundstrom, 2011, p. 337). However, it is clear that sporadic training is insufficient. Todaro and Smith note that because work environments, customer bases and services are now changing at a faster rate than ever before, a “continuous” approach to staff training is needed (2006, p. 37); similarly, Pluse and Craven emphasise the need to embed development within the library’s culture because “[o]rganizational learning is crucial to the success of a customer-focused service” (2002, p. 81).

Another theme in the literature is the importance of library managers communicating to staff their strategic visions, to “ensure that your library staff know what the common goals of the library are and how to meet them” (Bernstein, 2008, p. 22), a point echoed by McKinlay and Williamson (2010). Managers can boost staff engagement by encouraging staff at all levels to express their views and contribute to service design (McKinlay & Williamson. 2010, p. 193; Todaro & Smith, 2006, p. 103).

#### *2.6.5 The role of Library Assistants*

This research will particularly investigate the role of Library Assistants, and how Library Assistants’ attitudes to the issues investigated compare to Library Managers’ attitudes. By looking at Library Assistants this research will contribute to a thinly-covered area in the literature: *LISA* returns few results for this topic, and as Buchanan states, “library assistants are a relatively understudied group despite comprising a majority of library employees” (2005, p. 422). Existing literature about Library Assistants’ roles in various sectors indicates that in addition to constituting the majority

of the workforce, Library Assistants are at the forefront of customer service (Rowley, 1996, p. 31). Woodward notes that in some American academic libraries the majority of customer-facing work is undertaken by “staff members with less education, little understanding of the library’s mission, and lower salaries [i.e. Library Assistants]” (2009, p. 22). While Woodward’s tone seems derogatory, this is nonetheless an important reminder that Library Assistants may have different attitudes towards their roles and their customers than professional staff.

In a study of American Library Assistants, Buchanan found that the majority recognise the importance of training to help them perform their jobs better, and many would like more training (2005, p. 423). In the UK context, a study from Cardiff University noted that “motivating library staff is an ongoing challenge”, and boredom is a particular problem for Library Assistants who carry out a lot of repetitive tasks (Earney & Martins, 2009, p. 213-8). Earney and Martins’ solution was a job rotation exchange for Library Assistants, something also recommended by McKinlay and Williamson (2010) to increase staff engagement and motivation.

## *2.7 Summary*

This chapter has assessed the current professional literature relating to this project’s research aim of exploring what effect increased tuition fees have had on the attitudes and opinions of UK academic library staff towards their customers and their roles.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods used for data collection and analysis, and the ethical issues considered.

Various terminology is used for the components of the research process. This dissertation uses terminology outlined by Pickard:

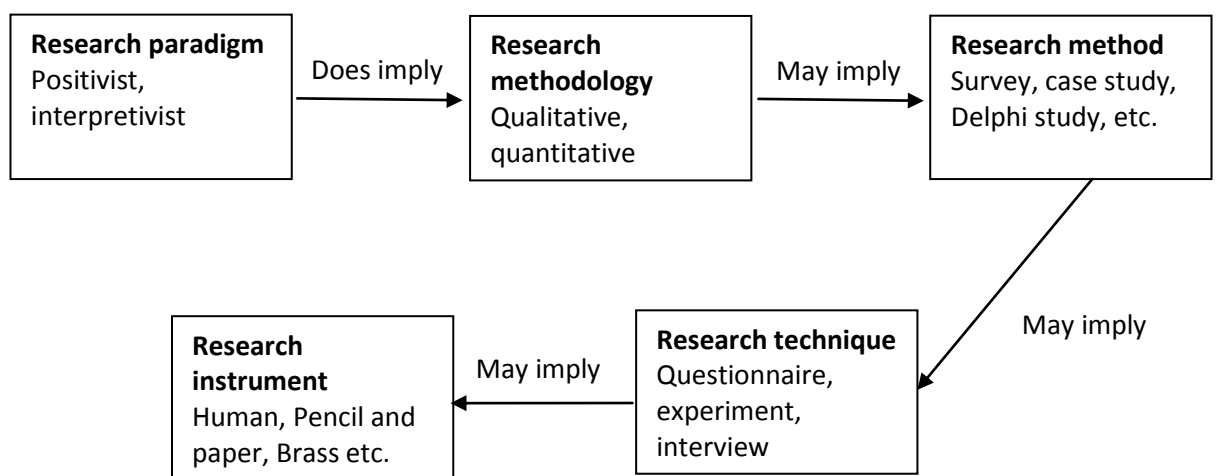


Figure 1: *The research hierarchy*, adapted from Pickard, 2013 (p. xvii).

#### 3.2 Research paradigm and methodology

There are two social research paradigms: positivist and interpretivist. Positivism emphasises logic and scientific evidence in search of a single reality; interpretivism rejects attempts to treat human participants as objectively as scientific experiments, instead accepting reality as multiple, holistic, and context-dependent (Pickard, 2013, p. 6-13). Positivism is associated with quantitative methodology; interpretivism with qualitative methodology. As this project aimed to investigate attitudes and opinions, an interpretivist stance and qualitative methodology were adopted. This decision is justified by the literature: Pickard describes the focus on human experience in qualitative research (2013, p. 16), and likewise Silverman states that “an interest in subjectivity and the authenticity of human experience is a strong feature of qualitative

research” (2010, p. 6). However, some quantitative demographic data was also collected.

### *3.3 Research method chosen*

This project adopted a comparative design. Bryman describes comparative design as a “multi-case study”, in which two or more cases are studied using similar methods; comparative design research can be qualitative or quantitative, and in qualitative studies interviewing is a commonly associated technique (2012, p. 72-76). As increased tuition fees have affected universities nationwide, a multi-case study comparing institutions would provide a rich picture. Another benefit of the multi-case study is that “it improves theory building... the comparison may itself suggest concepts that are relevant to an emerging theory” (Bryman, 2012, p. 74), which suits the interpretivist stance.

### *3.4 Research techniques chosen*

Data was collected at four universities (see 3.5.4). At each university, a qualitative semi-structured interview was undertaken with the Library Manager<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore at two universities, qualitative focus groups were held with Library Assistants<sup>3</sup> who carry out customer-facing work for at least one hour a week. All participants were asked to supply quantitative data via a short demographic questionnaire. Both Library Managers and Library Assistants were involved to gain a rich picture and compare staff attitudes at different levels.

The strategy was mixed-methods, in that multiple data collection techniques were used, and also that both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered. Many authors note the benefits of using multiple techniques in terms of triangulation: “[b]y having a cumulative view of data drawn from different contexts, we may... be able to triangulate the ‘true’ state of affairs by examining where the difference data intersect” (Silverman, 2010, p. 133). Specifically, there is justification in the literature for combining interviews and focus groups (Barbour, 2007, p. 44), which “can provide access – and potential for comparison between – public and private accounts” (Barbour, 2014, p.

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<sup>2</sup> The term “Library Manager” denotes a top-level manager e.g. Head Librarian or Director.

<sup>3</sup> The term “Library Assistant” denotes employees whose jobs do not require professional qualification, not just those with the job title “Library Assistant”.

220). There is also support for collecting quantitative demographic information as a “pro-forma” within a broadly qualitative study (Barbour, 2014, p. 113), because adhering rigidly to one methodology means “the potential afforded by the other tradition is... neither acknowledged nor exploited” (Barbour, 2014, p. 204).

### *3.5 Sampling*

#### *3.5.1 Type of sampling*

Sampling means selecting a manageable number of participants from the population being studied; here the populations were all Library Managers and all Library Assistants in UK academic libraries. Probability sampling is associated with quantitative research, and aims to select a sample which represents the wider population. Purposive sampling, associated with qualitative research, is “conducted with reference to the goals of the research, so that units of analysis are selected in terms of criteria that will allow the research questions to be answered”, but the results cannot be generalised to the whole population (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). Purposive sampling was used as this study aimed to collect detailed qualitative data, so this gave freedom to pursue information-rich cases offering opportunities for comparison.

Purposive sampling has many types. In *a priori* sampling the criteria for selection are decided in advance, and participants are selected before the research begins (Pickard, 2013, p. 64). In “contingent”, or “snowball”, sampling the criteria evolve during the research process, depending on emergent results (Bryman, 2012, p. 418; Pickard, 2013, p. 65). Contingent sampling is “more truly qualitative, as it maintains the emergent nature of the research... [but] To walk out into the field not having an *a priori* sample map, now knowing who to include in your investigation, can be a very nerve-wracking experience, even for the most experienced researcher” (Pickard, 2013, p. 65). This project therefore employed *a priori* sampling.

#### *3.5.2 Sample size*

Consideration was given to the number of interviews and focus groups to be conducted. This is a complex question: “[i]f the number of subjects is too small, it is difficult to



generalize... If the number of subjects is too large, there will hardly be time to make penetrating analyses” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 113). Following Pickard’s advice to consider time, geographical and financial constraints (2013, p. 115), it was felt that four Library Manager interviews and two Library Assistant focus provided an appropriate balance between thoroughness and practicality. It was clear that fewer focus groups should be conducted, as these are more complicated to organise and analyse (see 3.7.1). Two was deemed an appropriate number as this “may place the researcher on firmer ground in relation to making claims about the patterning of the data, since it would suggest that the differences are not just a feature of a one-off group” (Barbour, 2007, p. 59). The number of participants per focus group was also considered. Pickard’s suggestion of six to ten participants (2013, p. 245) is typical, though Barbour argues that groups larger eight are difficult to moderate and analyse (2007, p. 60). As this was the researcher’s first moderating experience, and as participants may become reticent in larger groups (Bryman, 2012, p. 507), it was decided to seek six participants per group.

### *3.5.3 Sampling strategy*

The member lists of the London Universities Purchasing Consortium (London Universities Purchasing Consortium, 2013) and the Southern Universities Purchasing Consortium (Southern Universities Purchasing Consortium, 2014) were used as a sampling frame. This limited the selection to universities in London and Southern England, which was geographically convenient, but included many contrasting universities. The lists were pasted into a spreadsheet and collated with information about universities’ age and student population size. To utilise connections, two universities at which the researcher had previously worked were included in the sample. Two further universities were then purposively sought, with a view to representing institutions of contrasting age, size, and location. While this was a convenience sample, it was not felt that this would jeopardise the integrity of the research. Indeed, convenience sampling is common because “[a]lthough it is useful to sit in a research office and draw up a sampling frame, it is not always possible to fill all the boxes identified... In practice, theoretical models, knowledge of the existing literature, knowledge of a specific locality, contacts and gatekeepers, and serendipity all play a role” (Barbour, 2007, p. 61).

### 3.5.4 Sample selected

The following table shows the universities selected<sup>4</sup>:

<b>Institution pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Student population</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Focus group</b>
University A	Founded as a college in the 1880s; became a University in the 1900s.	Around 9,000	Greater London	✓	
University B	Founded as a college in the 1890s; became a University in the 1920s.	Around 17,000	Southern England	✓	✓
University C	Founded in the 1960s.	Around 11,000	Southern England	✓	✓
University D	Became a University in the 1990s; previously a polytechnic college.	Around 12,000	London	✓	

Table 1

Focus groups were carried out at Universities B and C, the researcher's former workplaces. Because requesting several Library Assistants to participate in a focus group during working hours is a considerable demand, it seemed appropriate to ask Library Managers with whom the researcher had existing connections.

The fact that many participants knew the researcher (and, in the focus groups, knew each other) was considered. Patton recommends selecting focus group participants who are strangers (2002, p. 387). Contrastingly, Barbour argues "focus groups with pre-

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<sup>4</sup> To maintain confidentiality the size and age information are approximate, and citations are not given.

existing teams may facilitate more rounder or reasoned responses” (2007, p. 34), and Mellinger and Chau’s study indicates that participants relax more with a familiar moderator (2010, p. 275). As it would have been difficult to organise focus groups with unconnected Library Assistants from different institutions, this seemed the best solution.

### *3.5.5 Invitations to participants*

The Library Managers were initially contacted by email. Upon expression of interest they were sent formal information letters (see appendices 2 and 3). For universities B and C this included a request to conduct a focus group. Different approaches were used for inviting focus groups participants at these two universities. At University B the researcher was permitted to send an email directly to the Library Assistants’ mailing list. Volunteers were accepted on a first-come-first-served basis until the desired number was met. At University C the Library Manager preferred to act as an intermediary and invite participants on the researcher’s behalf. All Library Assistants who volunteered were then sent an information letter (see appendix 4).

## *3.6 Semi-structured interviews*

### *3.6.1 Rationale*

Before considering semi-structured interviews, it is important to note that interviewing in general enables researchers to collect data which is detailed, personal, and descriptive of individuals’ experiences (Patton, 2002, p. 341; Pickard, 2013, p. 196; Silverman, 2010, p. 124-5), which suits this project’s aim of investigating staff perspectives. One-to-one interviews facilitate “eliciting detailed contextualized histories” (Barbour, 2007, p. 42), making them particularly suitable for Library Managers, who have advanced professional experience. Compared to methods like questionnaires, interviews elicit extended, non-standardised responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 115; Pickard, 2013, p. 205). Furthermore, interviews allow the researcher to probe for details (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 115), and observe non-verbal expression such as tone or facial expression (Bell, 2010, p. 161). A disadvantage is that interviewing is time-consuming, which limits the sample size (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 115).

This project used semi-structured interviewing, which means the researcher has a guide outlining topics and questions to cover, but there is flexibility to alter the sequence or probe if necessary (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 124; Silverman, 2010, p. 195). This method compromises the extremes of structured and unstructured interviewing (see 3.9) as “the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). The guide makes semi-structured interviewing suitable for novice researchers (Pickard, 2013, p. 195), and helps the interviewer to use their time effectively (Patton, 2002, p. 343). Additionally the guide ensures that each interview covers broadly the same topics, facilitating analysis (Bell, 2010, p. 162-3), particularly in studies which include multiple cases because “you will need some structure in order to ensure cross-case comparability” (Bryman, 2012, p. 472).

### *3.6.2 Procedure*

The interview guide design was an important consideration. The literature indicates that within semi-structured interviewing, researchers differ in terms of how tightly they structure their interviews, and that it is legitimate to include some fixed questions alongside more general topics for discussion (Barbour, 2014, p. 120; Patton, 2002, p. 347). Kvale and Brinkmann observe “[t]he more spontaneous the interview procedure, the more likely one is to obtain unprompted, lively, and unexpected answers... The more structured the interview situation is, the easier the later conceptual structuring of the interview by analysis will be” (2009, p. 131). As this was the researcher’s first interviewing experience, key topics were assigned fixed questions; others were listed as headings to discuss unscripted. The literature advises interviewers to sequence topics in a flowing way, but be prepared for some flexibility depending on participants’ responses (Barbour, 2014, p. 120; Bryman, 2002, p. 473). Another recommendation is to begin with unthreatening topics (Barbour, 2014, p. 144) such as “non-controversial present behaviours, activities, and experiences” (Patton, 2002, p. 352).

Interview questions, whether scripted or spontaneous, should be “open-ended, neutral, singular and clear” (Patton, 2002, p. 353). The literature contains much advice on question design. It is important to avoid: ambiguous language, leading questions,

questions which can be answered “yes/no”, and questions which ask more than one thing concurrently (Bryman, 2012, p. 473; Patton, 2002, p. 353-7). Semi-structured questioning includes flexibility for probing to “deepen the response to a question, increase the richness and depth of responses, and give cues to the interviewee about the level of response that is desired” (Patton, 2002, p. 372). Barbour recommends that interviewers imagine directions that the discussion may take and prepare relevant probes (2014, p. 118). Another good practice is to summarise the main points discussed after each section or at the end of the interview, permitting the interviewee to clarify or reconsider (Barbour, 2014, p. 118; Patton, 2002, p. 371). To practice interview questioning, a pilot interview was carried out with an academic library manager, resulting in the interview guide shown in Appendix 5. Piloting research techniques is highly recommended in the literature (Bryman, 2012, p. 474; Pickard, 2013, p. 192; Silverman, 2010, p. 197).

All interviews except one (Library Manager C) were recorded using an iPhone. Recording offers security and aids accurate analysis (Pickard, 2013, p. 200; Silverman, 2010, p. 199-200), and helps the interviewer to interact naturally with the participants as they are not note-taking (Patton, 2002, p. 381). There are drawbacks, for example participants may become self-conscious (Pickard, 2013, p. 201; Bryman, 2012, p. 483), but it was felt that the benefits outweighed this possibility.

### *3.7 Focus groups*

#### *3.7.1 Rationale*

Focus groups are “a non-directive style of interviewing, where the prime concern is to encourage a variety of viewpoints” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 150). Focus groups involve several participants, and the researcher acts as a “moderator” to steer the discussion. Traditionally associated with consumer research, focus groups have recently gained popularity in the social sciences (Bell, 2010, p. 165; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 50). Focus groups reveal “the ways in which individuals discuss a certain issue *as members of a group*, rather than simply as individuals” (Bryman, 2012, p. 501): this method therefore suits Library Assistants, who are the largest staff group in academic libraries.

Focus groups facilitate data collection from multiple participants simultaneously, which is time-efficient (Patton, 2002, p. 386; Pickard, 2013, p. 243). Furthermore, “if used correctly, [focus groups] can provide extremely rich data with enormous potential for comparison” (Barbour, 2014, p. 134). In a group situation the researcher has less control, so there is more potential for participants to speak spontaneously and reveal topics which are important to them rather than discussing only those foreseen by the researcher (Barbour, 2007, p. 33; Bryman, 2013, p. 503; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 150). Accordingly, Kvale and Brinkmann write that “[f]ocus groups are well suited for exploratory studies in a new domain” (2009, p. 150). The increase to £9,000 fees was recent enough that this topic has not been exhaustively researched, and furthermore Library Assistants are an understudied group, so focus groups could unearth unexpected angles.

However, focus groups are “not usually recommended to new, inexperienced researchers as [they demand] a relatively high level of understanding” (Pickard, 2013, p. 243). Despite the temptation to view focus groups as a quick way to gather lots of data, they are difficult to organise (Barbour, 2007, p. 22; Bryman, 2012, p. 517). Focus groups also yield enormous amounts of data to analyse (Bryman, 2012, p. 517). Other difficulties include the potential for certain participants to dominate the discussion, so the moderator must manage dominant and reticent participants (Bryman, 2012, p. 517-8; Patton, 2002, p. 386-7; Pickard, 2013, p. 245). Focus groups are problematic for researching sensitive topics, as participants may feel uncomfortable or pressured to conform to social norms (Bryman, 2012, p. 518; Patton, 2002, p. 386-7). There is also potential for disagreements, but as Bryman (2012, p. 515) and Barbour (2007, p. 81) note, this can be advantageous: “[w]hile interaction and disagreements represent distinctive features of the focus group compared to individual interview in qualitative research, it is also the case that they add a layer of complexity to the analysis of the ensuing qualitative data” (Bryman, 2012, p. 515).

This research project was carried out in awareness that focus groups are a challenging technique, requiring much effort for successful moderation and analysis. However as this research did not involve any particularly sensitive topics, and most participants knew one another and the researcher, the risks of social embarrassment and interruption

were comparatively low. The advantages of gathering large quantities of rich data, in a social situation where participants can speak spontaneously, outweighed the possible disadvantages.

### *3.7.2 Procedure*

As with semi-structured interviews, focus group moderators prepare a guide (Pickard, 2013, p. 245), which can vary from broad topics to a detailed list of questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 511). As focus groups are challenging for a first-time researcher, a detailed checklist of questions and topics was used. It was felt that this approach would still enable lively discussion between participants, for as Bryman states, “[a] more structured approach to questioning might inhibit... spontaneity but is unlikely to remove it altogether” (2013, p. 512). Barbour recommends easing participants into focus groups with general questions before addressing more specific topics, but warns researchers that topics may come up in discussion outside the intended sequence (2007, p. 83). Both focus groups were held in library teaching rooms, and refreshments were provided to create a relaxed environment (Barbour, 2007, p. 74; Mellinger & Chau, 2010, p. 270-71).

Literature about focus group moderation was consulted. Consequently, each session began with the researcher introducing herself and the research, and outlining the format and rules such as not interrupting (Bryman, 2012, p. 513; Mellinger & Chau, 2010, p. 270-1; Pickard, 2013, p. 245). The literature recommends that moderators avoid dominating the proceedings: their role is to introduce topics, probe for detail when interesting points arise, and intervene if the discussion goes off-topic (Barbour, 2007, p. 82; Bryman, 2012, p. 509; Pickard, 2013, p. 246). However, “the focus groups researcher should generally be prepared to allow at least some discussion that departs from the interview guide, since such debate may provide new and unexpected insights” (Bryman, 2012, p. 512). As with interviews, Barbour recommends preparing probes for anticipated lines of discussion (2007, p. 82). Barbour (2007, p. 82-3) and Mellinger and Chau (2010, p. 246) advise conducting pilot sessions. As focus groups are time-consuming to organise, it was impractical to contact another university for a full-scale pilot. The questions were therefore trialled with four librarian friends of the researcher. This was a useful opportunity to refine the guide, resulting in Appendix 6.

The focus groups were audio recorded. Recording is strongly recommended because focus groups generate such enormous quantities of data that it would be difficult for the moderator to capture the discussion by note-taking alone while remaining engaged with the participants (Barbour, 2007, p. 76; Barbour, 2014, p. 140; Bryman, 2012, p. 504). Recording focus groups poses some problems, notably the difficulty of analysing the tapes and establishing who said what (Barbour, 2014, p. 140; Pickard, 2013, p. 245). However as most participants were known to the researcher, this was not a problem.

### *3.8 Demographic questionnaires*

#### *3.8.1 Rationale*

Many writers on qualitative research note that “it is important... to examine individual voices within discussions” (Barbour, 2007, p. 31). Hence it is common, particularly with focus groups, to gather some quantitative demographic data to contextualise qualitative responses (Bryman, 2012, p. 513). Questionnaires are inexpensive to create (Pickard, 2013, p. 207), so seemed an appropriate supplementary technique for this purpose. When deciding what information to collect, related literature about library staff was consulted. Rowley’s discussion of staff motivation notes the influence of factors such as length of service, work experience, age, and career aspirations (1996, p. 34); furthermore, Todaro and Smith’s advice on staff customer service training highlights workers’ educational background and level of responsibility (2006, p. 34). It was felt that factors relevant to these authors’ contexts could be reasonably extrapolated to this project’s focus on staff attitudes.

#### *3.8.2 Procedure*

The questionnaire was distributed to all interview and focus group participants in print. As the questionnaire was a supplementary technique, and the number of participants comparatively small, online questionnaire tools did not seem a worthwhile time investment. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire after their interview/focus group. The literature reveals contrasting views about the positioning of demographic data collection: while Bryman mentions collecting demographic forms during the “introduction phase” to focus groups (2012, p. 513), the arguments that



demographic questions are “basically boring” (Patton, 2002, p. 353) and should be reserved for the end of the process (Pickard, 2013, p. 210) seemed more compelling.

The questionnaire consisted primarily of closed dichotomous questions, in which participants choose between fixed alternatives (Pickard, 2013, p. 211). It is easy to process data collected from closed questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 249), which seemed appropriate as the questionnaire was supplementary technique. Advice on questionnaire design was consulted, for example the importance of supplying an exhaustive list of alternatives and ensuring that categories do not overlap, to eliminate confusion for participants (Bryman, 2012, p. 252; Pickard, 2013, p. 211). To ensure unambiguous wording the questionnaire was tested on the pilot interview participant, resulting in Appendix 7.

### *3.9 Other techniques considered*

#### *3.9.1 Unstructured interviewing*

Unstructured interviewing aims for maximum flexibility, so no guide is used. The strength of this technique is “the opportunities it offers for flexibility, spontaneity, and responsiveness to individual differences” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). As the interviewee talks freely, with minimal steering from the researcher, unstructured interviewing is useful for research in emergent fields as it can reveal topics needing further exploration (Patton, 2002, p. 342; Pickard, 2013, p. 199-200). However, unstructured interview data is challenging to analyse as systematic comparison is difficult when participants are not asked the same things (Patton, 2002, p. 343). Furthermore Pickard warns “I would never recommend that a neophyte interviewer attempted a totally unstructured conversation... lack of experience could lead to very little being taken away from the interview” (2013, p. 195), hence this method was discounted.

#### *3.9.2 Structured interviewing*

In structured interviewing everyone is asked the same things, adhering to a tightly-designed sequence (Patton, 2002, p. 344). Structured interviews can be done quickly allowing a large sample, and the data yielded is simple to analyse as closed questions

with fixed-choice responses are common (Bell, 2010, p. 162-3; Bryman, 2012, p. 211; Patton, 2002, p. 345). Structured interviewing also carries the lowest risk of results being influenced by interviewer variability, as each interview follows an identical pattern (Bryman, 2012, p. 210). Despite these advantages, structured interviewing was discounted as it is often viewed as a quantitative method (Bryman, 2012), which contradicts the aims of this research project. While closed questions facilitate data analysis, this prohibits gathering detailed responses (Bryman, 2012, p. 470), and the focus on standardisation eliminates the opportunity to probe and interact with participants (Bryman, 2012, p. 470; Pickard, 2013, p.199). Semi-structured interviews and focus groups therefore seemed the most appropriate techniques.

### *3.9.3 Telephone interviewing*

It was debated whether semi-structured interviewing could be done by telephone. Telephone interviewing would eliminate geographical constraints (Bryman, 2012, p. 488), allowing a larger sample covering all regions of the UK. However, the disadvantage is that the interviewer misses non-verbal signals such as tone, facial expression and body language (Barbour, 2014, p. 117; Bryman, 2012, p. 488), so it seemed that deeper interaction would be achieved face-to-face.

### *3.10 Methods of data analysis*

The purpose of qualitative data analysis is “making sense of massive amounts of data. This involves reducing the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal” (Patton, 2002, p. 432).

#### *3.10.1 Transcription*

Mindful that one hour of interviewing may take five hours to transcribe (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 180), the recordings (and notes in the case of Library Manager C’s interview) were typed up as soon as possible to avoid a deluge at the end of the data collection process (Bryman, 2012, p. 484, Pickard, 2013, p. 201). The researcher transcribed the recordings herself; this is recommended for first-time researchers to

become familiar with the data, begin the interpretive process, and learn about their questioning style (Barbour, 2007, p. 78-9; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 180). Kvale and Brinkmann note the difficulties of representing verbal conversations on paper (2009, p. 178), and thus recommend that researchers state explicitly how their transcriptions relate to the spoken word (2009, p. 180-1). Therefore, the following key is provided for this project's transcripts:

Emphasis.	Shown in <b>bold</b> .
Pauses.	Noted in [square brackets].
Participants beginning a new sentence without completing the previous sentence.	Indicated with an ellipsis (...).
Non-verbal utterances such as laughter.	Indicated in [square brackets].
Vocal pauses (e.g. "Mmm").	These are included in the transcript.
Unclear words.	Shown as {???}.

Table 2

### *3.10.2 Theoretical influences*

#### *3.10.2.1 Grounded theory*

No discussion of qualitative data analysis can avoid reference to grounded theory, a form of analysis developed by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s, which has profoundly influenced subsequent literature. The defining principle of grounded theory analysis is that "emphasis must always remain on theory emerging from the data" (Pickard, 2013, p. 187), rather than the data being assimilated into pre-existing theories. Features include theoretical sampling (Bryman, 2012, p. 569; Pickard, 2013, p. 181) – a contingent purposive sampling strategy in which participants are chosen based on the emerging theory with the aim of reaching "theoretical saturation" (Bryman, 2012, p. 419-20) – and the simultaneous collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2012, p. 387; Pickard, 2012, p. 181). Grounded theory also involves a specific coding strategy. The stages are open coding (the data is broken down and categorised), axial coding (relationships are made between the categories), and selective coding (the researcher decides which categories are core, and which are sub-categories branching off them) (Bryman, 2012, p. 569; Pickard, 2013, p. 271-2).

While grounded theory presents desirable ideals, often these are not practical. For example “[t]he time taken to transcribe recordings of interviews, for example, can make it difficult for researcher, especially when they have tight deadlines, to carry out a genuine grounded analysis with its constant interplay of data collection and conceptualisation” (Bryman, 2012, p. 574). Furthermore, it is unlikely that theory will emerge solely from the raw data without any influence from the researcher’s pre-conceived ideas, because “our approaches to qualitative research and even the questions we ask are inextricably embedded in our disciplinary and cultural assumptions” (Barbour, 2014, p. 265). Consequently most social research uses a “pragmatic version” of grounded theory adapted to the needs of each project (Barbour, 2007, p. 120-1; Barbour, 2014, p. 266).

Some grounded theory-based advice was followed in this project, for example the researcher attempted to think analytically during the data collection phase and noted down relevant analytical points as they emerged (Patton, 2002, p. 436; Pickard, 2013, p. 280). However many aspects of the design deviate from grounded theory, such as the use of *a priori* rather than theoretical sampling, and the fact that the majority of coding and analysis was carried out after data collection rather than simultaneously.

### *3.10.2.2 Thematic analysis: the Framework approach*

Having acknowledged that a grounded theory approach would not be possible, alternative methods were investigated. A common practice in qualitative research is “thematic analysis”, which Barbour describes as “a unifying principle, since it is utilized by virtually all data analysts, regardless of their avowed approach” (2014, p. 261). Yet despite its prevalence thematic analysis is rarely acknowledged as an analysis method in its own right (Barbour, 2014, p. 261; Bryman, 2012, p. 578). The thematic analysis in this project was inspired by the Framework method, devised by the National Centre for Social Research (Bryman, 2012, p. 579; NatCen Learning, 2012). Designed in the 1980s, Framework is a “[p]ragmatic toolkit approach” in which the data is broken down and arranged in a matrix display according to both case and theme (NatCen Learning, 2012). For example:

	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
Interview 1			
Interview 2			
Interview 3			
Interview 4			

Table 3

The Framework approach offers a structured, transparent way of displaying data, and facilitates comparative analysis of each piece of data within its case (horizontally), or with references to the same theme in other cases (vertically). This is accessible to novice researchers. The themes derived from the data are described in 4.3.1.

### *3.10.3 Computerised versus manual analysis*

Qualitative data analysis can be assisted using computer programmes such as NVivo. However, both Bell (2010) and Barbour (2014) discourage first-time researchers from using software as “[i]t is essential... to learn the principles of qualitative data analysis before exploring and of the available computer packages” (Barbour, 2014, p. 260). Consequently, manual analysis was used in this project.

### *3.11 Ethical considerations*

This research project followed Aberystwyth University’s *DIS Ethics policy for research* (Urquhart & Rogers, 2014), which is based on the *Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association* (British Sociological Association [BSA], 2002). The overarching principle of research ethics is that researchers “have a responsibility to safeguard the proper interests of those involved in or affected by their work, and to report their findings accurately and truthfully” (BSA, 2002, para 6).

#### *3.11.1 Potential harm to participants*

While a study of this nature is unlikely to physically harm participants, many authors note that due to the personal, reflective nature of qualitative inquiry there is a risk of psychological distress (Barbour, 2007, p. 93; Patton, 2002, p. 405-7; Silverman, 2010,

p. 152). Researchers must minimise or alleviate any distress (BSA, para 28), to which end Barbour recommends anticipating challenging topics which may arise (2007, p. 93). For this study potential concerns were that participants might air grievances about their working lives or about the tuition fees increase, but generally the risk of distress was considered lower than for studies focusing on participants' personal lives.

### *3.11.2 Informed consent*

The key principle of research ethics is to gain informed consent from participants, which means that “they understand what they are agreeing to, accept what is being asked of them and are comfortable with the purpose of the research and the intended use of the data they are providing” (Pickard, 2013, p. 89-90). Following advice from the literature to ensure informed consent as far as possible (BSA, 2002, paragraphs 16-19; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 40; Patton, 2002, p. 407), research participants received letters outlining:

- The topic and purpose of the research.
- The name, institution and contact details of the researcher and research supervisor.
- The format and duration of the interview/focus group.
- The right to decline audio recording.
- The right to withdraw from the proceedings at any time, for any reason.
- The right to confidentiality, both personally and institutionally.
- The use of the data collected, and likely future audiences of the report.
- Their right to receive a summary of the results of the study as a debriefing.

(See appendices 2, 3 and 4).

Before the research took place all participants completed consent forms confirming that they understood the information given in the letter and were freely consenting to participate, as recommended by Bryman (2012, p. 140). Although the forms were not completed until the day of participation, they were distributed at the same time as the information letters because “subjects should never be expected to sign any protocol form unless they have had time to read and consider the implications” (Bell, 2010, p. 46). (See appendices 9, 10 and 11).

### *3.11.3 Anonymity and confidentiality*

The terms “anonymity” and “confidentially” are often mistakenly used synonymously, so it is important to differentiate: “[a]nonymity means nobody knows who the participant is, confidentiality means nobody will be told the identity of the participant” (Pickard, p. 93). As the researcher met the participants in person it was not possible to provide anonymity, but participants were offered confidentiality hence pseudonyms are used in the results chapter. The BSA advises that even when pseudonyms are used, subjects’ confidentiality could be breached if their attributes make them identifiable (2002, para 36), so participants’ universities were also assigned pseudonyms.

### *3.11.4 Records management*

Another important element of ethical practice is storing data securely to prevent unauthorised access and breaches of confidentiality (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 186-7; Urquhart & Rogers, 2014). Accordingly all documents relating to the data collection (participants’ details, recordings and transcripts) were password-protected on the researcher’s laptop and deleted after dissertation marks were awarded.

### *3.12 Limitations and lessons learnt*

It was clear at the outset that the research would have some limitations. Due to geographic factors and the time constraints of the dissertation project, only universities in Southern England were studied; it is possible that including institutions from the Midlands and North would have generated different findings. Consideration was also given to the fact that participants at Universities B and C knew the researcher, and the potential effect this might have on their responses. Nonetheless, it was felt that the benefits of utilising existing connections outweighed this risk.

Other limitations arose during the study. Despite contacting numerous institutions, it was not possible to achieve the desired variety in the sample. The institutions included became universities between the 1900s and the 1990s, and had student populations ranging from around 9,000-17,000; while this offered a fair amount of contrast, the sample would ideally have also included an institution founded in the 1820s with a

population of around 29,000. The timing of the study (autumn term, a busy time for academic libraries) was possibly the reason several institutions declined to participate. Furthermore, the University C focus group only had 5 members rather than 6, because one participant was called away to deal with a work-related problem shortly before the group was due to start. In future, the researcher would follow Bryman's advice to have a reserve list due to the high risk of "no-shows" in focus groups (2012, p. 517-8).

There were some limitations which affected individual interviews. Library Manager C's request not to be recorded was of course respected, but this meant that only a few short direct quotes from this interview could be presented in the results chapter. Nonetheless, handwritten notes were taken to capture the essence of his responses in prose form. Library Manager D had only been in post 10 months and had recently undertaken a restructure resulting in the loss of around half his staff. Consequently he could not speak about his strategies at University D within a long-term perspective, but compensated for this by drawing comparisons with his previous roles.

### *3.13 Summary*

This chapter has outlined the methods used for data collection and analysis, the reasons for these choices, and the ethical issues considered.



## 4. Results

### *4.1 Introduction*

This chapter presents the results of the research, illustrated with quotes.

Participants are denoted by pseudonyms indicating their position and institution. Focus group participants are numbered. For example:

LM-A            Library Manager, University A

LA-B1           Library Assistant, University B.

Abridged quotes are indicated by [...].

## 4.2 Quantitative findings from the demographic questionnaire

All participants completed the questionnaire. There was no missing data.

### Number of participants

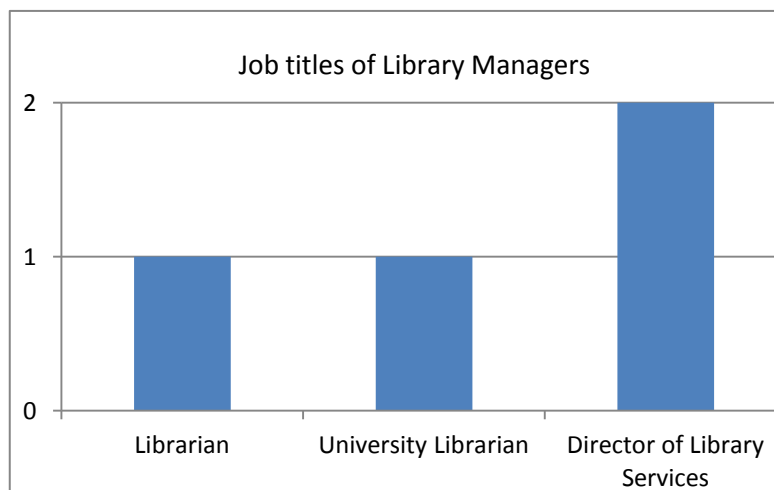
The participants involved were:

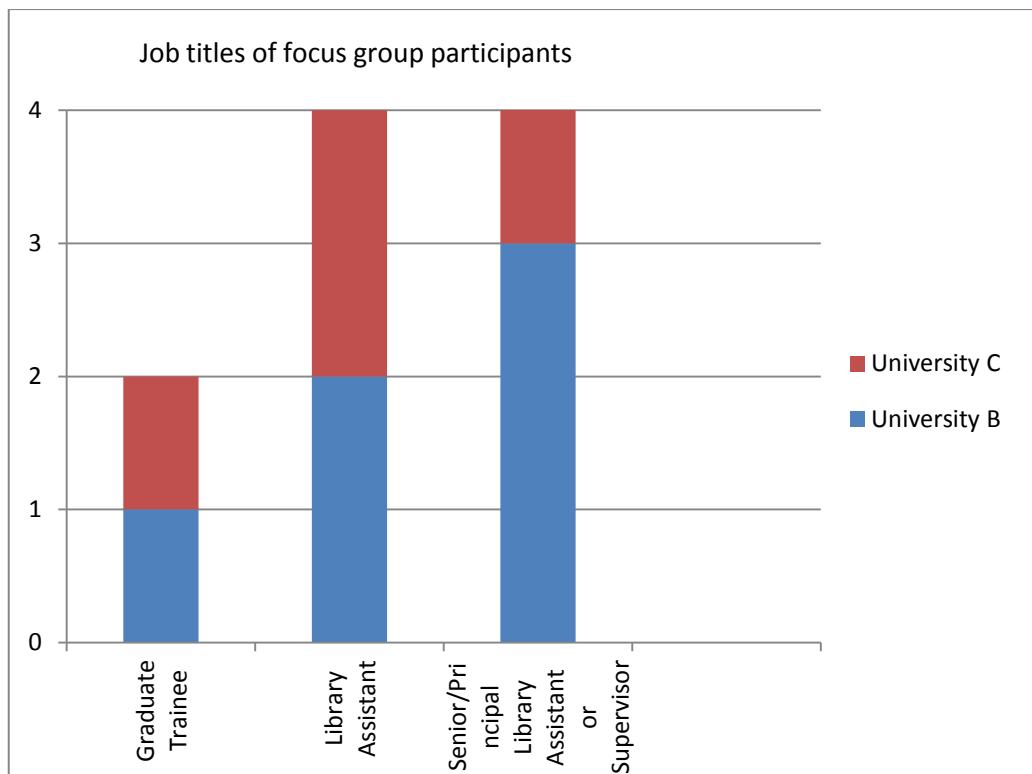
Library Managers		4
Library Assistants	University B	6
	University C	5
	All	11
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>

Table 4

### Job titles

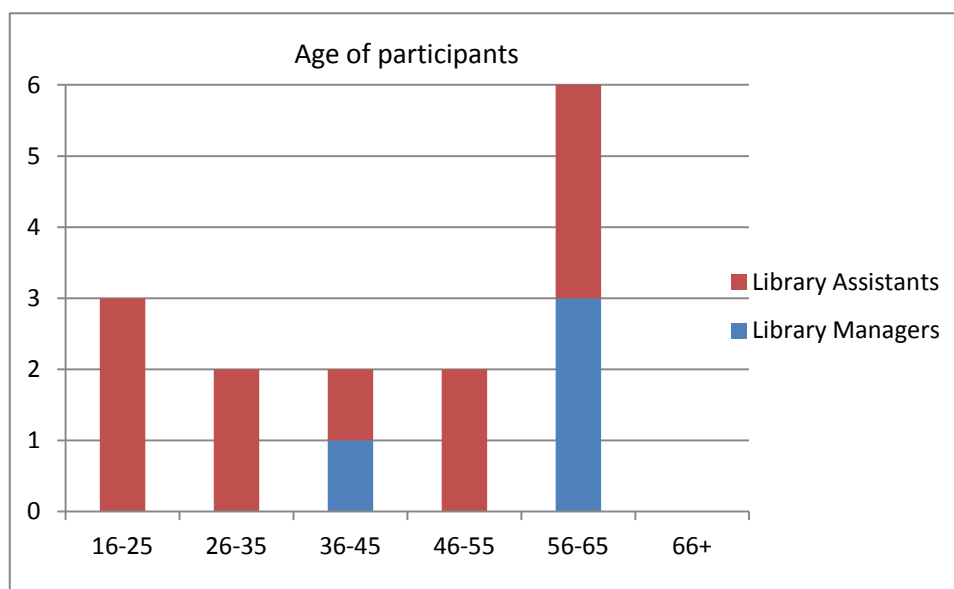
The participants' job titles were:





## Ages

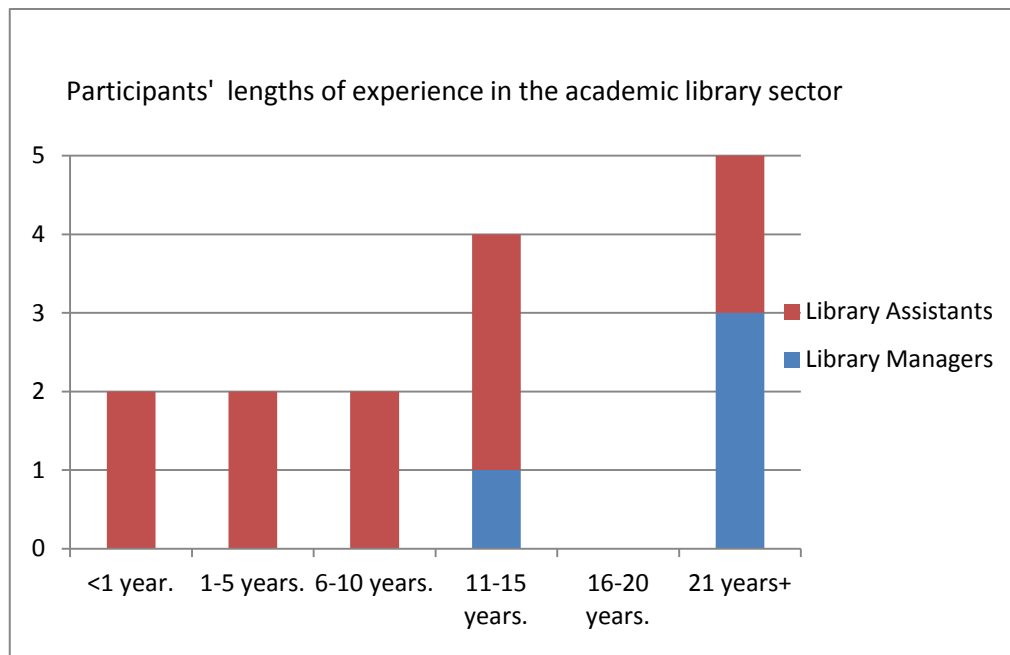
The participants' ages were:



Except “66 or older”, all age categories were represented. Logically, the Library Managers were concentrated in older categories.

### Experience

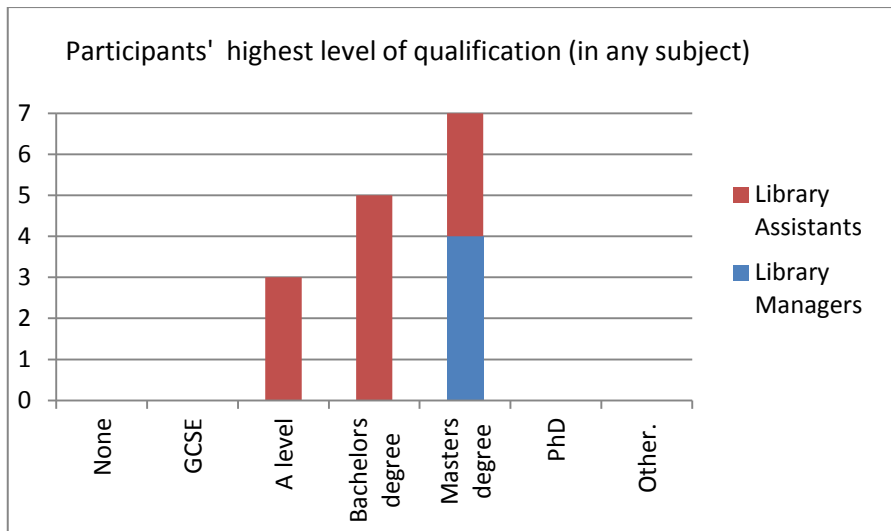
The participants’ lengths of experience in the academic library sector were:



A range of experience levels were represented. Naturally, the Library Managers were concentrated in more experienced categories.

### General qualifications

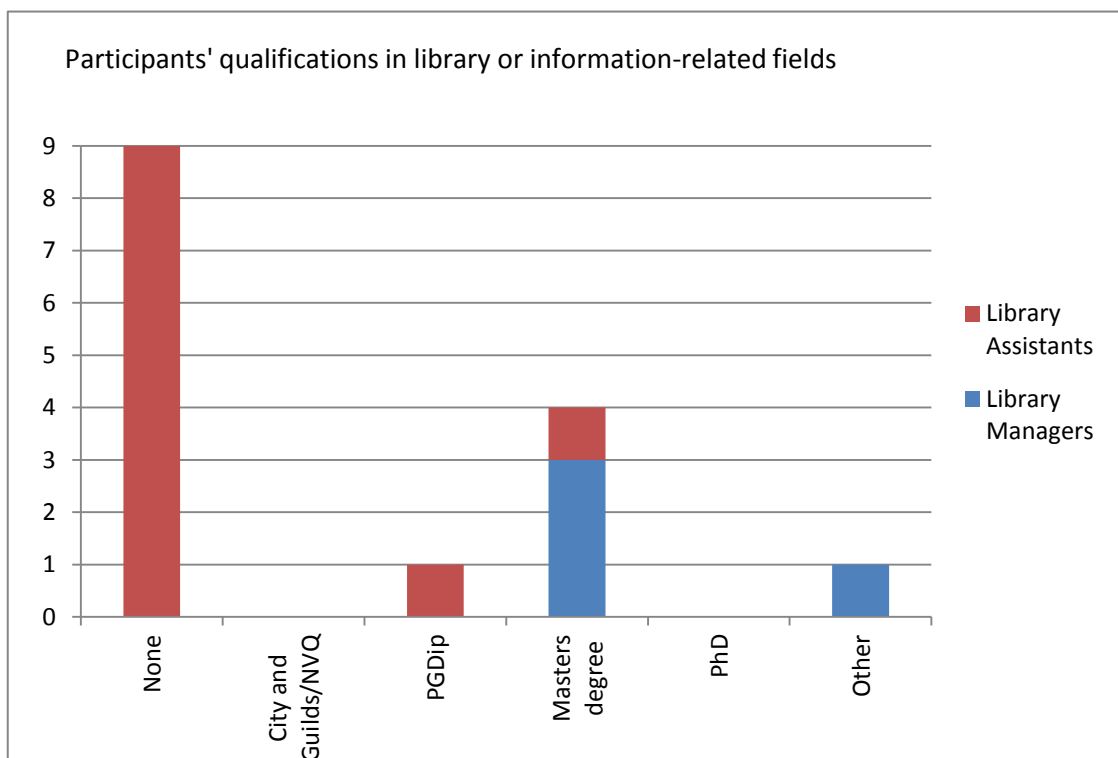
The participants’ highest level of qualification (in any subject) were:



The Library Assistants' qualifications ranged from A level to Masters degree, with a Bachelors degree being most common. All Library Managers had Masters degrees.

### LIS qualifications

The participants' qualifications in library or information-related fields were:



The majority of Library Assistants had no library or information qualifications, although one had a Postgraduate Diploma and one had a Masters Degree. Unsurprisingly, the Library Managers were more highly-qualified: they all had Masters degrees except one, who had an MCLIP qualification from the Library Association (now the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals [CILIP]).

### 4.3 Qualitative findings from the interviews and focus groups

#### 4.3.1 Method of coding qualitative data

The transcripts were scrutinised for repeated topics, agreements, disagreements and common language (Bryman, 2012, p. 580). A “shared coding frame” for both interviews and focus groups was sought, to enable comparison between the different participant groups (Barbour, 2014, p. 222). Following Barbour’s advice, coloured pens were used to identify themes at first (2007, p. 117). The literature emphasises that analysis is iterative (Barbour, 2007, p. 127; Barbour, 2014, p. 264-5) hence the coding frame was revised several times, narrowing it down from an initially large number to 13 main themes. The 13 themes, and their relationship to the research objectives, were:

<b>Objective 1 - To obtain library staff opinions about students being considered consumers.</b>	
Theme 1a	Student expectations and behaviour in the context of increased tuition fees
Theme 1b	Terminology used.
Theme 1c	Service ethos.
Theme 1d	Staff attitudes towards their users in the context of increased tuition fees
<b>Objective 2 - To explore whether Library Managers have implemented any changes to their services or strategy, as a result of the increased tuition fees.</b>	
Theme 2a	University-wide trends
Theme 2b	Library responses to increased tuition fees
Theme 2c	Library performance measurement in the context of increased tuition fees
Theme 2d	Other factors causing change in academic libraries
<b>Objective 3 - To discover whether library staff feel their roles and working life have been influenced by the increased tuition fees.</b>	
Theme 3a	Continuity in working life
Theme 3b	Changes in working life linked to increased tuition fees
Theme 3c	Changes in working life linked to other factors
<b>Objective 4 - To discover whether library managers are responsive to any impact the increased tuition fees have had on their staff.</b>	
Theme 4a	Staff training
Theme 4b	Communications and change management.

Appendix 8 illustrates a coded transcript.

Table 5

#### 4.3.2 Qualitative findings arranged by theme

### **Objective 1 - To obtain library staff opinions about students being considered consumers.**

#### Theme 1a - Student expectations and behaviour in the context of increased tuition fees

The majority of participants, to a greater or lesser extent, felt that increased fees have caused students to adopt a “consumer” or “customer” mindset, and have higher expectations from universities and their libraries. Library Managers observed:

*I think they all have higher expectations, even if they're not the type of student who sees themselves simplistically as a customer [...] because they're borrowing more, they're going to come out with more debt, so they're investing more into the system. (LM-B).*

*The expectations of students of the various services that are offered, not just in the library, we have evidence to suggest that they are much higher. (LM-A)*

In terms of what these expectations are the Library Managers related feedback gathered at a strategic level, while Library Assistants relayed direct user-facing experience. Many participants observed that students expected to buy fewer books, and were less accepting of printing charges, than previously:

*There's a greater belief, or feeling among students that there should be the right number of books available for them to carry out their study, so more responsibility on the university than there used to be. And another example is around online resources, or material through the Virtual Learning Environment, if they have to print it out they have to pay for printing, so that's another example where they have said “we had assumed that that might be included in our fees we pay” (LM-A).*

*for core textbooks that maybe in previous years they would have been expected to buy, there's a reluctance on their part because eventually they're going to have to pay back however much. (LA-C5).*

Higher expectations of library facilities were also associated with increased fees:

*they expect facilities to be available and good, whether it's Wifi or printers or decent toilets, that kind of thing. I think there is an expectation there that has changed. (LA-B6).*



Opening hours were another common topic. Although many participants noted that 24-hour opening pre-dated £9,000 fees, some felt that the fees increase had heightened students' expectations of this:

*that's gained impetus around the sector [pause] almost entirely probably because of increased fees and student expectations being, you know "If I say we want the library open 24 hours it should be". (LM-B).*

Numerous participants had experienced student complaints directly linking their expectations to the monetary value of their fees; Library Assistants through face-to-face interactions, Library Managers through strategic-level feedback:

*We have had people saying things like, "well I'm paying £9,000". (LA-C1)*

*I don't remember people saying "I'm paying £3,000" a year for this", or "I'm paying £1,000 a year for this" (LA-C5).*

*You get the occasional piece of feedback from surveys saying "I'm paying £9,000 for this, I would expect more". (LM-A).*

At Universities B and C, Library Managers and Library Assistants alike felt students were more confident in voicing expectations, with both institutions having experienced Students' Union campaigns around library services. LM-C discussed campaigning about 24-hour opening, courtesy notices, plug sockets and Wifi, though noted that this began during previous fee regimes rather directly since £9,000 fees. LM-C was a student in the 1960s, and joked that at that time petitioning the Vice-Chancellor over library facilities was unthinkable; students were busy having fun. LM-B commented that even where demands weren't new, students' manner of expression had intensified since the fees increase, a viewpoint shared by several Library Assistants:

*there's always been that continuous improvement, you know, sort of effort, but the students were less organised, you know, particularly think places like the Students' Union [...] They were less organised about wanting it (LM-B)*

*a further example of how organised and how relentless it is, they're already, quite rightly, talking about "Why isn't [24-hour opening] all the year, not just term time?" (LM-B)*

*they are more confident about expressing their desire for good facilities and having enough materials available. (LA-B4).*

### Theme 1b - Terminology used

To measure attitudes, participants were asked about the terminology they employ to describe library users.

“Students” was a popular term, used by LM-C and many Library Assistants from both focus groups. “Users” was also common, with LM-A and LM-B both noting a preference for this term, particularly in formal written contexts. Some Library Assistants also employed “users”, but due to practical necessity rather than a genuine preference:

*“Student” if you’re referring to them as a student, but “users” if you’re talking about library members more generally. (LA-B6)*

The term “customers” divided participants’ opinions. LM-D happily used “customers” interchangeably with “students”. However, others showed reluctance towards the term:

*I don’t like to use the word “customers”. Um, and I try to make sure that in the library we always talk about the “library users”, not the “library customers”. (LM-B).*

Many Library Assistants resisted “customers” due to its association with retail services including shops and banks. There was a clear differentiation of libraries’ educational importance from transactional retail services:

*“Customer” always sounds, yes, like a shop, like they’re going to pay for something there and then. (LA-B2)*

*A customer’s someone who just comes in, buys something and walks out again. Whereas with students it’s just a little bit more than that. (LA-C3)*

Concern was expressed by Library Assistants in both groups about the connotation with “the customer is always right”, another retail association:

*I’m not [pause] happy with it because it brings to mind phrases like “the customer is always right” [...] they’re not customers in the sense that, you know, in the university we’re in the business of educating. (LA-B4).*

The difference between retail and library services was also discussed by several Library Managers, including LM-A, who admitted sometimes saying “customers” colloquially.

*my own feeling is that [pause] in an educational establishment you are not buying your degree, you are not... it's not comparable to, um, going into a shop or a bank and wanting to buy a pair of shoes or wanting to have a loan, or whatever. Um, you have more... you have to do more work on your part. It's more of a partnership than... it's that sort of relationship. (LM-B).*

*They've got a broader role than customers, I mean, they're contributing as members of the institution etcetera so they are not just customers. But I would refer to them in certain aspects of their life as customers, you know, if you're trying to use a piece of equipment or you're trying to ask an enquiry of somebody, and you might be in a queue or something, a short queue one would hope, that is a customer experience. But as individuals they are students of [University A]. They, um, have a role far beyond a customer. (LM-A).*

### Theme 1c - Service ethos

There was much discussion of participants' opinions about the role and ethos of the academic library, in relation to increased fees.

A dominant theme was the library's primary educational purpose. For example LM-C strongly viewed the library as an educational establishment and place of study, continuing tradition. Similar viewpoints arose in both focus groups:

*that whole business of what they're doing here and what we're doing with them seems to me to be based on their educational needs. (LA-B3)*

Participants' opinions as to whether they considered the library a service in a consumer sense, with a purpose of pleasing its users, were divided. LM-D accepted this perception, noting that in his institution:

*[it is] very clear that staff should remember that students are paying fees, etcetera etcetera. And so [pause] that does in itself lead to a desire to remember that [...] students are customers. (LM-D).*

Contrastingly, others raised strong concerns that in the context of increase fees, consumerist attitudes might cloud the educational and societal roles held by universities and their libraries:

LA-C3: *I see we're a service to people, but it's an academic service to people, not a business. I mean, I know it is, but I didn't like seeing it as that [...] I just like to think that we're here for something else.*

Researcher: *And what do you think that something is?*

LA-C3: *Um, to improve people's access to education as much as possible.*

Despite reluctance to label library users “customers” or to accept a consumer view of library services, implicitly participants were passionate about providing good customer service. LM-C highlighted the importance of responsiveness to user needs and “service ethos”, which he felt had been a component of academic librarianship for decades. Other Library Managers expressed similar views:

*the fundamental goal really is to ensure that the... that we're delivering the right experience to meet the expectations of students and researchers. (LM-A)*

*libraries have had a customer focus... I use the word “customer” focus... a user focus for a long, long time [...] One of the early parts of an institution like a university to have that, ahead of other bits of the university. (LM-B)*

It therefore appeared that participants’ reluctance was not to the notion of “customer service” itself, but to being explicitly labelled as a consumer service to the detriment of libraries’ educational role. LM-C emphasised that although “customer” was not used in his library, the standard of service was no lower than in settings where that term is used. Similarly, LM-D referred to his previous workplace, where:

*some people really didn't want to call students “customers” but we, kind of, agreed that even if we don't call them “customers” explicitly, you know, we should treat them as customers. (LM-D)*

However, both Library Managers and Library Assistants differentiated libraries from other forms of customer service regarding the extent to which users’ demands are accommodated, particularly in the context of increased fees:

*[Library service is] focused on the user but isn't just “whatever you say you want I will do,” because they're in a partnership with us. We can't necessarily say “Yes, it's fine for you to have that book as long as you need it,” because other people need it. (LM-B).*

*just because they're paying doesn't mean [pause] they can ask for anything or get everything they want because we are in the business of being an educational establishment. (LA-B4).*

### Theme 1d - Staff attitudes towards their users in the context of increased tuition fees

Mixed attitudes towards library users were expressed.

Many participants sympathised with students over the financial pressures which have heightened their expectations of library facilities and resources, especially Library Assistants who had recently graduated themselves, or whose children had:

*When I was a student I was happy to buy books, but if you're paying £6 grand more than I did, you would expect not to have to fork out (LA-B2)*

*students are taking a much bigger... making a much bigger financial investment in where they choose to go [than I did] (LA-C4)*

*my youngest son finished last year [...] and he was the last year to have had the £3,000 fees. But he wouldn't have gone if it was £9,000. (LA-B5)*

Library Managers expressed similar views. LM-C noted that young people faced a complex financially-oriented decision when applying to university, and consequently empathised with students taking a consumer-like approach to library services. Similarly, LM-D said:

*I don't have a problem with it. (LM-D).*

Another positive attitude expressed by participants was that due to increased fees, students were exhibiting greater motivation and diligence. LM-C discussed this at length, while Library Assistants' comments included:

*I think a few years ago that you might have had people coming to university because they couldn't quite decide what career they were going to do, or because the job situation wasn't that great [...] these days, I think students in themselves need to be really focused on what they intend to do with their degree at the end of it. Because otherwise it's a very expensive time, isn't it? (LA-B6).*

Conversely, some participants expressed concerns that the consumer forces brought into higher education by increase fees were leading to a sense of entitlement among students:

*the one thing that [pause] I would perhaps say is that tuition fees have done is some of the attitudes, particularly of the really younger students, who, um, I think they do feel that they're buying their degree [...] and that it's absolutely guaranteed at the end. (LA-C1).*

*I'm not sure that their expectations of themselves have increased. I think often they expect us to do an awful lot, and to provide good service, I absolutely accept that. But I'm not so sure that they correspond with their behaviours. (LA-B3).*

*I hear accounts of people saying that they are facing people saying that they shouldn't have to pay fines because they're paying these fees [...] I'd say "No, that's not the point of the fines". (LA-B4).*

Another concern raised by Library Assistants at University C was that students express higher expectations without understanding that library budgets have not increased proportionally to tuition fees:

*LA-C5: Um, the other thing is that obviously our income hasn't automatically gone up as a result of their...*

*LA-C1: £9,000.*

*LA-C3: I think there's a lot of misunderstanding when it comes to fees.*

*Others: Mm, yes.*

*LA-C3: I think a lot of them... and it's like students, you know, they say "oh I'm paying £9 grand fees now", it sounds like when they say that "oh I should be expecting this", it's like something they've just heard, or they say "oh that's a lot of money so I should be getting...". Whereas they don't actually understand the effects of it or where [...] their money is going.*

In the University B focus group, an interesting point was made that increased fees had accelerated an existing shift attitudes from disciplinarian towards more accommodating treatment:

*I do think we treat students with more respect today than perhaps we did when I first came here [...] there was a divide between how we treated students and how we treated academic staff. Now there's much more focus on treating everyone equally as a user, whether they're staff or student. (LA-B6).*

*Yes, I think that was the old-fashioned idea, that you do what you're told. But I think there was no anticipation of how students or young people live today. (LA-B5).*

**Objective 2 - To explore whether Library Managers have implemented any changes to their services or strategy, as a result of the increased tuition fees.**

Theme 2a - University-wide trends

Participants observed changes in the university environments within which academic libraries operate; especially Library Managers, who are involved with university administration at a strategic level.

A key topic was the immense focus placed on “student experience”, which has driven investment into campus life, from academic buildings to services such as counselling.

*student experience is at the heart of the senior management team’s thinking. It’s what’s driving investment in the estate. (LM-D).*

*there is a huge piece of work and structure really set up around enhancing the student experience, from Welcome week [...] all throughout the year. Improvement of the sports facilities, huge investment has gone into that. Accommodation, etcetera etcetera. (LM-A).*

*we’ve had to put money into refurbish and revamp the whole campus [...] We’ve had to, sort of, step up in a lot of facilities that we provide for students, so I think that’s all part of it. (LA-B6).*

Library Managers commented that the £9,000 fees have heightened competition around student recruitment and increased universities’ attention to their reputation:

*every institution’s set about enhancing its profile and its distinctiveness, and what it can offer to students. A huge amount of market research and other types of research have been carried out by [University A], and there have been significant changes in the website, in the printed publications that we send out, the whole way in which we deliver open days. (LM-A).*

*if an institution feels it’s got a really good idea that is really boosting the student experience, and they think they’re first off with this, there’s a bit of reluctance to share that [...] if they’ve got a good competitive edge, or they think they have, they want to keep it for a little while (LM-B).*

*probably the only time my boss has ever rung me about something is when there was a negative tweet on the social media about the library, and we had to respond very quickly because it was a public thing (LM-D).*



At University D, which became a university more recently than the other institutions, the importance of student recruitment was described in candidly financial terms:

*[tuition fees are] the biggest chunk of our income. We're not getting as much research and enterprise income as we want, so the tuition fees is absolutely critical [...] we are very much at the whim of, um, the students' desire to come here and the fees they pay. We don't have endowments, we don't have a lot of other income. (LM-D).*

Graduate employability was another concern. LM-C noted that his university now offered a more holistic curriculum, with options such as mathematics and modern languages in addition to the degree program, to boost students' employability. Similarly:

*a [University A] passport scheme is in place where students gather a certain number of points for carrying out certain roles as volunteers [...] that's co-ordinated by Careers and Employability here. (LM-A).*

*students here are from a very diverse and different mix of backgrounds, experience, some of them are from families that haven't been to university before, they're very conscious about coming to a university that is vocationally-orientated, so they expect to get employment after their experience here. And that's what we use in our promotion, you know, 95% of graduates have a job six months afterwards. (LM-D).*

Participants also mentioned changes in the higher education environment which do not relate to increased tuition fees; including concerns about research income, increasing student numbers, and the inclusion of more mature students.

### Theme 2b - Library responses to increased tuition fees

Library Managers identified various ways in which increased fees have impacted on library services. Both LM-A and LM-D had made undergraduates' needs their main focus, tying in with the university-wide student experience focus.

*I don't think I could deny the fact that we've aimed most of our improvements and change to ensuring that the... predominantly the undergraduates get an excellent service. (LM-A).*

As part of a restructure, LM-D had created a uniformed "customer experience" team to increase staff visibility and enhance the student experience:

*I was trying to create a new Customer Experience team which was servicing, um, the frontline with library and IT enquiries more so than in the past [...] So that's very much evolved as a result of the direction the university's going. (LM-D).*

A common theme across the four universities was renovation of library facilities; Universities B and C were carrying out considerable library refurbishment and extension, and Universities A and D had received approval for new libraries. LM-C described the library extension (which will add 380 study spaces) as a “tangible expression” of what students are getting for their money, and other Library Managers made similar points:

*[The university has] put money the library's way in order to refurbish the second and fifth floors, and now the third and fourth, and there's plans for more, that I would say is very directly related to the concerns... the general concerns of the university about attracting students, making a really good student experience, and, you know, the student fees are part of that concern. (LM-B)*

*there's a big new library project under way, £50 million investment in the campus of which there's a refurbished, new refurbished library [...] I think that was obviously as a result of student feedback. (LM-D).*

24-hour opening had been in place for many years at University C, but other Library Managers linked 24-hour opening to increased fees and competition with other universities:

*no matter which way you cut 24 hours, it's not really a sensible business thing to do in a library [...] You cannot justify it on usage, a big building like this, on usage. You cannot justify it monetarily. The only way it's... it's sensible to do it is because it's a reputational thing and because it's important for student experience, meeting student satisfaction, doing what the student want, benchmarking. In other words, being on the same bandwagon. (LM-B).*

*Five or six years ago we had something like 70 hours a week was all we offered. But we've incrementally since then got extra funding to open for longer hours. So now we're open 24/5 throughout all the terms, plus a 24/7 period around exams, and we've extended opening hours throughout all of the vacations [...] that's one area where there's been transformational change that's been welcomed by students. (LM-A).*

Increased investment in learning resources was also common.

## Theme 2c - Library performance measurement in the context of increased tuition fees

The Library Managers revealed various attitudes towards performance measurement in the context of increased tuition fees. LM-A was enthusiastic about metrics, whereas others found this challenging:

*I suppose there are all sorts of measures and I don't suppose we use many of them very effectively. I think performance measurement is very hard in a service. (LM-B).*

The most discussed performance measure was the NSS. Participants were conscious of the importance attached to the NSS institutionally:

*with the National Student Survey just gone, there was a really big campaign for the first time to really encourage students to reflect about what they've got for their money and, um... think holistically, and really encourage them to give specific feedback over what they've received. You know, teaching, assessment, resources, facilities. (LM-D).*

*[the students] have a lot of influence. More, sometimes, than perhaps they realise in an institution, because the institution wants to get good NSS results. (LM-B).*

Library Managers dedicate considerable time to analysing NSS results - several reported reading every free-text comment - and use it to inform decision-making:

*I look at the breakdown of the subject scores for library question 16, and that too may dictate where our limited resources may be moved to [...] the hospitality and tourism score was pretty low, and we can see that they should have had a bigger share of the budget than they did. (LM-D).*

Participants' views on the validity of the NSS as a performance measure were mixed. Some expressed scepticism about its usefulness and potential for bias:

*in terms of a library the question is the NSS is rather wishy-washy, "is it good enough for my needs?" [...] So it's not a... doesn't dig very deep or allow much, you know, analysis really. (LM-B).*

*students may not give straight feedback about their experience because they don't want to denigrate the institution. So for instance if you undermine... if you say "oh, this is a terrible*

*place, I'm having a terrible experience", they see that that's going to affect how employers see them. (LM-D).*

However, the ability to appraise the library's performance in an institution-wide context was observed as a benefit of the NSS. Furthermore several Library Managers had found that NSS results can be used advantageously in funding bids, given the emphasis placed on student experience by university management:

*Well I think [the NSS results] helped make the case [for a new library] in a very big way. I mean, it wasn't just the case made by the librarians, it was made by the students [...] "The library's a joke", or "The library's too crowded". So any possibility of bias was ironed out by the comments coming back from the users. And also, I suppose, the upside of having a low score in the National Student Survey is you can make a case quite strongly. (LM-A).*

*I used [the NSS results] successfully in April this year to make a case for additional investment, so, you know, you can say "we've got relatively low NSS scores in our peer group, other institutions have got this, and their budget is x or y", and it's quite a nice way of demonstrating why you might need investment. (LM-D).*

*we got more money for materials a few years ago. We had a very, very hard battle for that [...] and I think [pause] partly because there wasn't the same pressure on the student experience and "oh we must make sure the students are satisfied, we don't want them complaining and saying 'we come to University B and we pay all this money and they don't have enough books in the library'". So we had a battle, we got the extra material funding, but we had a battle. I suspect that... if that comes out as a stronger theme again, the battle may be less hard to fight a second time. (LM-B).*

In addition to the NSS, Library Managers used the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), Student Barometer, and in-house surveys were used to gather feedback from users other than final-year undergraduates. Benchmarking against other libraries was also popular:

*we use [SCONUL statistics] for extracting information and then measuring it against the similar libraries [...] we would measure ourselves against various aspects of library service, whether it was number of students per study space, number of study hours per week per student, how much... what's the proportion we spend on staff and non-staff, what is the expenditure per FTE student on information provision, how we compare with other institutions, opening hours, all that kind of thing. (LM-A).*

## Theme 2d - Other factors causing change in academic libraries

While increased fees were one cause of change in academic libraries, it was clear from both Library Managers and Library Assistants that they were not the only cause. Increased demand for group study areas due to changing pedagogical styles were mentioned frequently:

*we provided many more group study rooms and increased the study spaces as far as we can, but it's still inadequate. (LM-A).*

*Libraries have to change all the time because of [...] the way teaching is conducted, so I'm thinking of mass higher education, more teaching being done that requires students to go off and do group work. (LM-B).*

The spread of learning technologies such as VLEs and increasing use of laptops were also discussed; meeting demand for plug sockets was identified as a challenge, particularly in older library buildings. The growth of e-resources was another factor, with some participants observing that students now enter university with greater prior experience than previously:

*The transformation from print to digital's transformed everyone's experience so there's social and cultural developments that have necessitated change, and change for the better. (LM-A).*

*every year it diminishes, the print aspect, so obviously that's the biggest change I've seen. (LA-B5)*

*[undergraduates] seem to be coming to the library with a bit more awareness of what they would do, perhaps in terms of online resources, where they're getting access to those now. Whereas previously their experience of the library at their previous sixth form or their school might have been very different; there was a bigger step between a school [...] and a HE library, so they seem to be catching up a bit more. (LA-C5).*

Interestingly, two Library Managers mentioned USA academic library trends as another influence on their strategy. Visits to the USA had inspired LM-C to adopt 24-hour opening earlier than other UK libraries, and to create a “student collection” (dedicated to multiple copies of taught course core texts, separated from the research collection). Likewise, LM-D noted:

*I'm also encouraging staff to, you know, get on LinkedIn, create profiles, have a social media presence. Because I think Americans are very strong on that side of things, in terms of being visible. (LM-D).*

**Objective 3 - To discover whether library staff feel their roles and working life have been influenced by the increased tuition fees.**

Theme 3a - Continuity in working life

When discussing the impact of increased fees on participants' working life, it was clear that some aspects had remained constant for years. LM-C in particular felt that the core of his role (staff management and collection building) had stayed constant for over three decades. LM-C had always emphasised the human interface and having a visible staff help presence for the students, so had not needed to adapt this in response to recent student demand. Other Library Managers observed continuity in some of the skills required by library staff, such as cataloguing and orderliness:

*You do need people who can catalogue books and who like to sit quietly and catalogue a book [...] you do need people who will enforce a rule, and tell people to be quiet, because they mustn't disturb other users if they're in a quiet part of the library. (LM-B).*

Theme 3b - Changes in working life linked to increased tuition fees

Few changes in working life were directly attributed to increased tuition fees; those which did arise came principally from the Library Assistants, who spent more time in direct user contact. For example, Library Assistants at University C indicated increased time spent handling complaints.

*LA-C1: we tend to get involved a lot more when there's, like, a confrontational issue. And I think there... I think we end up dealing with a lot more of those...*

*LA-C5: Mm.*

*LA-C1: Than we certainly ever used to. I think it would have been, because there were fewer of them potentially [...] they would tend to go to the most senior person on the desk, but I think [to LA-C5] you and I field so many more in our day-to-day role.*

Theme 3c - Changes in working life linked to other factors

Participants attributed many changes in their working lives to factors other than increased fees. Library Managers discussed extra responsibilities which have been added to their roles, such as university museums, study advice, and institutional repositories. Increased responsibility for copyright, Open Access (OA), research data

management, and overseas campuses were foreseen as potential challenges in the future. They were aware that in other institutions, Library Managers' roles had evolved into a broader Student Services management position:

*in a lot of other institutions, I think, it's been that decision to create a "one-stop-shop", add on Student Services, you know, maybe re-develop the library and make it bigger, you know, that's often fed into subsequently the Librarian becoming Director of Student Services and so on and so forth. (LM-B).*

*when I go to the SCONUL conference and see what my peers are involved with then, yes, it is evolving and some institutions now the Director of Libraries' role is wrapped up into a... I mean, almost to a Pro-Vice-Chancellor level, they take on additional areas, careers, media, learning and teaching. (LM-D).*

Participants discussed challenges presented by the growth of the internet and e-resources, which have necessitated increased investment of staff time into information literacy training. LM-C noted that University C's library extension would include two teaching rooms for this, and LM-D reported that as a result of restructuring:

*the focus on the academic support team is even more around, um, teaching support. They need to be confident with delivering classes, whatever, to students. Information literacy's the thing, we want to encourage more of that. (LM-D).*

Library Managers placed most responsibility for information literacy training with professional librarians, but Library Assistants at University C indicated that they too were increasingly spending time on this during enquiry desk work:

*LA-C2: It's much more hard to find reliable information, to select and decide which is relevant, trustable [...].*

*LA-C4: There's more emphasis on "you can use the internet but you need to find quality information".*

Technology was identified as another major change in participants' working lives. Both Library Managers and Library Assistants noted that self-service technology and outsourcing to external companies had affected library work:

*Obviously self-service is a major change, from serving the users to them serving themselves. So they can take out their own items and return them, renew books, pay their fines online now. So there's a lot more they can do in terms of self-service. (LA-B6).*



*technology's meaning that we don't have to do a lot of the... it's changing the nature of the workforce. We're outsourcing where we can, I've outsourced hosting of the library system and management of it, obviously a lot of people do that with cataloguing, increasingly our suppliers are doing things that in the past we would have done [...] our systems team used to have their own label printing setup, and you think, "you don't need that any more, that's what [name of supplier] can do". (LM-D).*

Participants felt that changes in the sector had altered the skill requirements of library work. The growth of e-resources and learning technologies had necessitated a greater level of IT and technical skills:

*you need people more and more confident and capable with technology. (LM-B).*

*the first time I started being a manager I was still typing, changing typewriter ribbons and cataloguing on printed cards, etcetera! So yes, the transformation from print to digital is what's really gone with me throughout my career, and necessitated significant change. (LM-A).*

*So many more of the questions that we get asked these days are "Why can't I connect to this?" and "Why doesn't my computer talk to this, and why doesn't that talk to that?" Which is obviously something that we never used to deal with. (LA-B4).*

Library Managers also noted that they now placed greater emphasis on their employees' customer care skills. LM-B noted that the fees increase had slightly heightened that transition, but were not the cause of it:

*LM-A: I think in the customer services area as well, there's... no longer is it people hiding behind a desk, and the person on the other side of the desk is privileged, almost, to be given an answer. Now people get [...] a much more customer-focused relationship there in that sense.*

*Researcher: So is that something you look for more in your staff more than you have in the past?*

*LM-A: Oh, definitely, customer service skills, absolutely.*

*I think what's happened in libraries over the last 10, 15 years and up until now has just made that need for people who are organised, methodical, analytical, accurate, and want to help people, can deal with people nicely, interact with them in a polite and friendly way [...] And latterly, and the student experience and the fees have enhanced that and made that more important. (LM-B).*

**Objective 4 - To discover whether library managers are responsive to any impact the increased tuition fees have had on their staff.**

Theme 4a - Staff training

The Library Managers placed much importance on staff training. However this focus had not arisen because of the fees' impact on their staff, as training was ongoing due to an interest in continuing professional development and factors such as technological change:

*the job of a librarian, in all its roles, has been transformed absolutely by the digital transition, really [...] Clearly that has meant there's been need for a lot of training, skills training, up-skilling, etcetera, etcetera. (LM-A).*

At Universities A and B, investment was made in a weekly staff training slot:

*we have an in-house training that's been here for a long time, actually. So throughout each term we have a training slot for library staff. It's an hour on Wednesday and Friday each week in term. There are certain... That's used for a range of functions of training possibilities in-house and some of those are around search methodologies, Refnote, Endnote, that kind of thing. (LM-A).*

*one of our big triumphs is the Staff Development Hour... We try and think both big and small about what staff might need. So when I say "small" it might be, you know, particular areas or sections of the library that have a need for a certain sort of training, but "bigger" might be that we've changed some sort of element of the system and lots of people are going to know that. (LM-B).*

More generally, Library Managers were keen to develop their staff through University HR courses, external courses, conferences, professional groups and networking events. Several expressed gratitude that funds were available for this:

*We have a significant budget that we use to enable staff to go on training courses externally. We use the M25 CPD25 quite a lot is one example... And we try to provide some support for staff doing [...] external degrees at Aberystwyth or Robert Gordon. (LM-A).*

However, some Library Managers acknowledged that in certain circumstances "buying in" skills was preferable to training existing staff; this was especially the case at University D, where a restructure had recently occurred.

*we've created new roles, we've recruited new blood, we're actually kind of buying it in with the... we're expecting the person to arrive with that [...] rather than train them up. (LM-D).*

*when we advertise for staff, we are seeking staff with the specific skills to do the specific roles [...] we do a Research Data Manager really. That would be someone that has got those particular skills to manage those challenges as they come in. (LM-A).*

Responses from the focus groups were generally positive, with many Library Assistants indicating that they felt well-equipped for their roles through the training and refresher opportunities available:

*[The Staff Development Hour] makes teams come together a lot more and you see people that you don't necessarily always work with [...] I think it definitely makes contact with students a lot better if you're being taught on... I went to a session on Blackboard last week so if anyone asks about that now I know how to answer the question. (LA-B2).*

*If things change in the library [...] there are opportunities mentioned that "if anyone wants any more training on this, a refresher on this, come along". If people are serving on the enquiry desk there's always an opportunity to have a refresher at the start of the academic year when new members of staff are being trained up at the same time. (LA-C5).*

However Library Assistants at University B were disappointed that, as a consequence of the institution's increased focus on teaching and research excellence in recent years, the HR department was providing fewer courses for support staff:

*Now there's not so many courses for support staff and more for, I would say, for academic and research staff [...] A lot of people have felt that, so there is quite a swing there. But there used to be loads when I first came here, and they were really helpful. There were courses on minute-taking and all those sorts of things. (LA-B6).*

*we all want to be able to keep our skills up-to-date, but you've got to have somewhere to go to be able to do that [...] for staff at our level, yes, that has been cut back. (LA-B4).*

#### Theme 4b - Communications and change management

Styles of communication and change management were discussed, but there was no indication that Library Managers had needed to alter their practice in these areas in response to the tuition fees' impact on their staff.

LM-A and LM-B emphasised the importance of incrementally repeated communication to keep staff aware of their objectives and any changes taking place, for example through newsletters, bulletin emails, meetings and appraisals:

*it's such a cliché, but "communication, communication, communication", and then some more communication, and then... maybe some more communication [...] you will have regular, sort of, bulletins, probably going out via email, you will have had probably something going out from a member of senior management if not me, someone else who's the right person for the project, whoever that is, setting the context and background for the whole thing. (LM-B).*

*We have quite a thorough appraisal process here [...] So through all that process the rationale is that each individual knows what their role is and how they're contributing to the wider goals. We have a Library plan each year where we define clearly what our objectives are. (LM-A).*

This approach was appreciated by the employees, with several University B Library Assistants commenting positively about the clarity of communication:

*things like the intranet keeps you up-to-date with what other sections and what other departments are doing. Open management meetings, that's been a big change. When I first started you didn't... you never would have been able to read the senior management minutes. (LA-B6).*

*we're quite well informed about things that are happening within our section. In terms of what's happening and changes that might be coming up within our section I feel that we are consulted on, and certainly the manner is consultative. (LA-B3).*

LM-D found communication with his staff challenging due to the recent restructure, but recognised a need to rectify this area:

*Because of what's happened here I haven't been able to communicate effectively as I want to. We're talking... it's very tricky. The communication here is very poor, whether it be in the Library or intra-university [...] we want to resurrect a monthly staff email newsletter, pulling together content that we can re-use as well in other communications with the schools. I'm resurrecting, again, the staff meetings which I'd put on hold over the summer because of restructuring. (LM-D).*

#### *4.4 Relationship between the quantitative and qualitative results*

There were correlations between demographic clusters in the quantitative results and participants' qualitative responses.

LM-A, LM-B and LM-C were all aged 56-65 with over 21 years' library experience. Consequently they provided a long-term perspective on trends in library and university-wide policies, and were particularly able to place tuition fees within a wider picture of change in academic libraries. They shared a belief that while libraries should provide excellent service to their users, libraries' educational purpose is more profound than retail consumer services. Contrastingly, LM-D (who was younger and had correspondingly fewer years' experience than the other Library Managers) was happier to accept a consumer view of library services, candidly discussing university's reliance on tuition fees and how they dictate library strategy.

LA-B2, LA-C3 and LA-C4 were all graduates aged 16-25, with under 5 years' library experience. Although they could not comment from long-term experience, they provided valuable insight based on their recent student experiences. They were empathetic towards the increased financial pressures facing students only a few years younger than themselves, and all three were reluctant to accept a "consumer" view of higher education.

Another grouping was the Library Assistants with "Senior", "Principal" or "Supervisor" titles (LA-B1, LA-B4, LA-B6, LA-C1 and LA-C5). There was demographic variety in the ages and qualifications of this group, but all had 6 or more years' library experience and were therefore able to compare students' behaviour patterns in relation to fee regime changes. These Library Assistants were also able to comment more extensively on library service trends due to their higher responsibility and involvement in decision-making.

#### *4.5 Summary*

This chapter has presented the quantitative and qualitative results of the study, together with illustrative graphs, tables and quotes.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter relates the results to the findings of other authors discussed in the literature review. The contribution of the results to the research objectives, questions and aim is assessed.

### 5.2 Comparison of results to literature review

The qualitative results were coded into themes relating to the research objectives. Correspondingly, the discussion of the results' relationship to existing literature is divided into sections for each objective.

Objective 1: To obtain library staff opinions about students being considered consumers.

Many participants in this study felt that increased fees have resulted in students holding “consumer” or “customer” mindsets towards higher education, confirming views expressed by several authors (Bickley and Corral, 2012; Coughlan, 2011; Coward, 2013; Grove, 2014). Following the introduction of “top-up” fees in 2006, Sykes described students with “a different way of looking at the university experience from that of students only a few years ago... students expect more choice now and more personalised services” (2007, p. 24); similarly after fees rose to £9,000, Priestner and Tilley (2012b) and Pulliam (2012) advised libraries to offer “boutique” services including longer opening hours to meet students' expectations. The expectations noted by participants mirror these ideas, for example 24-hour opening and resource provision tailored around core reading since students are increasingly reluctant to buy books.

Several participants reported complaints about library service where students directly mentioned their fees; this corresponds with findings in the literature about students' expectations of value-for-money from other aspects of their university experience such as class sizes (Abrams, 2014; Sellgren, 2014). Participants felt that current students were more confident in voicing expectations than previous generations, attributing this to increased fees and consumer mentalities. However, the existing literature suggests

that increasingly vocal complaints could also be linked to societal trends including social media and reality TV (Gannon-Leary & McCarthy, 2010; Sykes, 2007).

Participants' attitudes towards students being considered consumers correlate with opinions expressed in the literature. Findings from this study support Thompson's statement that "To many people working in libraries 'customers' is a difficult word" (2012, p. 150). Participants expressed discomfort about consumer mindsets entering their workplace, and were concerned that this might detrimentally affect academic libraries' educational and societal role. Likewise, various authors describe an idealistic feeling among library staff that their work has an educational mission and is more valuable than transactional work focused purely on consumerism (Cottrell, 2011; Gorman, 2000; Gorman, 2012; Hurst, 2013; Town, 2011). Although participants resisted explicitly using the terms "customer" or "consumer" in relation to their work, they were enthusiastic about providing good service and meeting user needs. This reflects Corral's statement that "[c]ustomer service... is at the heart of what we do and why we exist" (2002, p. 27), a viewpoint shared by others (Bernstein, 2008; Gorman, 2000; Priestner and Tilley, 2012b; Rowley, 1996).

The literature revealed some negative attitudes towards students' consumer attitudes since the introduction of tuition fees, for example as early as 2000: "[t]oday's UK students pay fees and expect value for money. Some expect to be spoon-fed information" (Dugdale, as cited in Matthews, 2002, p. 9). Some participants shared this view, raising concerns that students believed they were "buying" a degree, and had high expectations without understanding that library budgets had not increased proportionally to tuition fees. However in contrast to the literature, others revealed positive feelings towards students. For example, some expressed sympathy towards the financial pressure on students, or complimented their motivation.

Objective 2: To explore whether Library Managers have implemented any changes to their services or strategy, as a result of the increased tuition fees.

One theme from literature at the time of and just prior to the introduction of £9,000 fees was the prediction that universities and their libraries would need to respond with strategic change: "[t]he market economy in higher education will mean students have to

be treated as valuable customers” (Coughlan, 2011, para. 4). Library Managers’ comments concurred. They reported that institutionally, their universities were investing in the “student experience” to maintain a competitive edge in the student recruitment market. Likewise they noted changes in library services such as refurbishment, extended opening hours and increased customer service staffing.

Library Managers’ discussion of performance measurements, particularly the NSS, mirrored viewpoints from the literature. Confirming the findings of Flint et al. (2009) and Young (2011), participants were conscious of the importance attached to the NSS by their institutions and therefore put considerable effort into analysing the results and adapting their services around student demands. Several Library Managers had used NSS results to obtain library funding, mirroring Stanley’s findings (2009). However, like many authors (Creaser, 2006; Curtis, 2008; Stanley, 2009), they mentioned the shortcomings of the NSS as a performance measure, and its susceptibility to bias. Consequently the Library Managers combined NSS results with benchmarking and other surveys; triangulation of this kind was recommended by Young (2011). One opinion which the participants did not share was Walters’ scepticism about student feedback on the grounds that “many services can be evaluated authoritatively only by respondents with significant research experience or professional expertise” (2003, p. 99); contrastingly, the Library Managers appeared interested in students’ views.

Another common theme between the literature and the results of this study was that in addition to the influence of increasing fees, there are other factors causing Library Managers to adapt their services. Gayton (2008) and Hurst (2013) discussed pedagogical changes which have encouraged more group work; likewise, several participants had introduced strategies for meeting students’ changing study space needs. The literature referred to many changes in academic libraries as a result of technological developments and the arrival of technologically-savvy “Net Generation” students (Gayton, 2008; Hurst, 2013; Roberts, 2005; Woodward, 2009). Correspondingly, participants discussed changes introduced to their library services due to increase laptop use, VLEs, and the challenge of satisfying students who enter university with increasing prior experience of e-resources. In a departure from the literature, some Library Managers also based strategic choices on their interest in USA library trends.



Objective 3: To discover whether library staff feel their roles and working life have been influenced by the increased tuition fees.

Although the authors and participants mentioned above discussed changes to library services and strategy in response to increased tuition fees, neither the literature review nor the results of this study evince that library staff feel their roles have drastically altered as a result of this. Instead, tuition fees are one factor in a larger picture of other influences on library staff roles. Participants' responses correspond with Walker's statement that academic libraries have been "fundamentally re-shaped by changes in information-seeking behaviors [sic], scholarly communications, information technology, pedagogical practices [and] interdisciplinary approaches to scholarship" (2011, p. 7). For example, many counted technological developments such as e-resources as the biggest change in their working life and the skills required of them. Library Managers also emphasised changes to their roles due to new responsibilities such as institutional repositories.

Objective 4: To discover whether Library Managers are responsive to any impact the increased tuition fees have had on their staff.

As the participants of this study considered technological and pedagogical change to be the biggest factors impacting their working lives, Library Managers had not needed to respond to any direct impact of the fees increase on their staff. However, Library Managers' responses correlated with general advice in the literature about staff training and communication during periods of change. The Library Managers clearly acknowledged the importance of investing in staff training to maximise the quality of library services, mirroring the opinions of several authors (Matthews, 2002; McKinlay & Williams, 2010; Tilley, 2012). Another theme from the literature was the need for continuous rather than one-off training (Pluse & Craven, 2002; Todaro & Smith, 2006), and correspondingly some Library Managers had invested in a weekly training session. Buchanan (2005) found that Library Assistants also recognise the importance of training, with many wanting more training opportunities; participants' attitudes confirmed this, particularly at University B, where the decline in courses for Library Assistants was noted. Regarding communication, the Library Managers' responses

echoed Bernstein's advice to "ensure that your library staff know what the common goals of the library are and how to meet them" (2008, p. 22), for example repeated, incremental communication and appraisals were mentioned as ways of ensuring that all staff understand their role in achieving the library's strategic aims.

### *5.3 Contribution of the results to the research questions*

The contribution of the results to each of the research questions will be addressed in turn.

Question 1: To investigate whether, in the current higher education climate, UK academic library staff view students as "consumers".

The results of this study indicate that, in today's higher education climate, many students view *themselves* as consumers; for example, participants commented on students' increasing expectations in relation to the value of their fees. Although some sympathy was shown towards the financial pressures which have caused students to develop this view, the question of whether library staff view students as consumers is more complex. Many participants were reluctant to use the terms "customer" to describe students, noting that libraries have an educational role and duty towards the whole university community which means that individuals' demands cannot always be accommodated. Participants wanted to offer high-quality services to students, but this was based on a belief in the importance of supporting students' education more so than on a perception of students as consumers.

Question 2: To investigate whether Library Managers and Library Assistants share the same perceptions of students in this context.

In the literature review it was noted that "library assistants are a relatively understudied group despite comprising a majority of library employees" (Buchanan, 2005, p. 422), so one intention of this study was to compare Library Assistants' and Library Managers' views. It was clear from participants' responses that Library Assistants and Library Managers held broadly similar opinions towards students in the context of increased

tuitions. Participants from both groups felt that students had begun to view themselves as consumers of higher education and were more confident in expressing their expectations, and both groups raised concerns about the potentially detrimental effect of consumer attitudes on libraries' educational mission. While Library Managers' perceptions of students were mainly based on strategic-level feedback, the Library Assistants spoke from more direct customer-facing experience, giving specific examples of student behaviour and expectations they had encountered first-hand.

#### *5.4 Contribution of the results to the research aim*

The research aim was to explore what effect increased tuition fees have had on the attitudes and opinions of UK academic library staff towards their customers and their roles. The study produced interesting results which are relevant to this aim.

Following the 2012 tuition fees increase library staff of all levels have become aware of students' increasing expectations, and Library Managers have striven to understand and accommodate these expectations. However this is not due to a simplistic perception of students as consumers, as the participants emphasised that they view the academic library's principal role as an educational one. While it was acknowledged that increased tuition fees have brought many changes to the higher education sector as a whole, participants did not consider fees an immediate cause of change to their roles. Instead, participants felt that technological and pedagogical changes were the greatest impacts on their working lives.

#### *5.5 Summary*

This chapter has related the research results to the literature review, and assessed their contribution to the research objectives, questions and aim.

## **6. Conclusion**

### *6.1 Introduction*

This chapter summarises the dissertation, and reflects on how the research aim, questions and objectives have been met.

### *6.2 Conclusion*

The dissertation aimed to explore what effect increased tuition fees have had on the attitudes and opinions of UK academic library staff towards their customers and their roles. The research objectives were to:

1. obtain library staff opinions about students being considered consumers.
2. explore whether Library Managers have implemented any changes to their services or strategy, as a result of the increased tuition fees.
3. discover whether library staff feel their roles and working life have been influenced by the increased tuition fees.
4. discover whether library managers are responsive to any impact the increased tuition fees have had on their staff.

The literature review indicated that, in addition to the influences of technological change, pedagogical trends and the global economic downturn, UK academic libraries have been affected by the increase to £9,000 tuition fees. This has led to a growing sense that students are now “consumers” of higher education, and there is consequently an expectation for library services to be more personalised and accommodating of students’ lifestyles. In this climate of heightened expectations, universities and their libraries are placing a greater emphasis on performance measures such as the NSS. Another strong theme was that library staff play a vital role in providing the customer service needed in today’s challenging academic environment, so there is a need for ongoing investment in staff development and motivation to cope with this. However, there were indications that library staff may be resistant to the concept that students are “consumers” or “customers”, due to the idealistic values attached to education.

This study employed a mixed-methods research strategy, involving library workers from contrasting institutions in London and Southern England. This comprised four qualitative semi-structured interviews with Library Managers, and two qualitative focus groups with Library Assistants. Additionally, all participants completed a quantitative demographic questionnaire. The interviews and focus groups were manually transcribed and thematically analysed using the Framework method. Some difficulties were encountered in finding institutions willing to participate, and one focus group participant was lost. If this study were replicated, the researcher would recommend carrying out the research during a quieter period for academic libraries, and having a reserve list of participants.

The results revealed that participants felt increased tuition fees had resulted in some students adopting a consumer mindset towards universities and their libraries. Students were described as confident in expressing heightened expectations around resource provision, facilities and opening hours. Participants cared deeply about providing excellent services and meeting their users' needs but were reluctant to accept a "consumer" view of students, as this was considered damaging to libraries' educational mission. Library staff had mixed attitudes towards students in the context of increased fees; these included sympathy around the financial pressures facing students, and concerns about students' increasing sense of entitlement. Increased fees had caused universities to be acutely aware of student recruitment, student experience, and graduate employability. Libraries too had responded to these changes, with common examples including renovation of facilities, extended opening hours, extra investment in resources, and an increased focus on NSS results. However, the increased tuition fees were only one factor in a wider picture of change affecting academic libraries and the working lives of library staff. Other influencing factors noted were changing pedagogical styles and technological developments. The results did not indicate any particular impact of increased tuition fees on staff training, communications, or change management in academic libraries.

The results obtained clearly matched research aim and objectives. As purposive rather than probability sampling was used, it is not possible to generalise the results to all UK academic libraries. However the fact that many common responses arose from the four institutions studied, and the strong correlation between the results and the existing

literature, suggest that the broad themes of the research may be transferable to other academic libraries.

**Word count = 14,993 words.**

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## **Appendices**

### *Appendix 1: Literature search terms*

Academic libraries

Consumer(s)

Customer care

Customer satisfaction

Customer service

Customer service charter(s)

Job satisfaction

LibQual+

Librarian attitude(s)

Librarian stereotype

Library assistant(s)

Library service

Library staff attitude(s)

Motivation

National student survey

NSS

Perceptions

Performance measurement

Satisfaction

Staff motivations

Staff satisfaction

Staff stress

Student demands

Student expectations

Student feedback

Student satisfaction

Student(s) as customer(s)

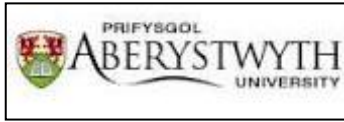
Tuition fees

UK

User surveys

User satisfaction

*Appendix 2: Information letter to Library Managers at universities A and D*



**Information letter:  
Invitation to participate in an interview**

[Date]

Dear [name],

My name is Marion Harris and I am studying for an MSc(Econ) in Information and Library Studies by distance learning with Aberystwyth University. As part of my MSc course I am conducting a dissertation project exploring what effect increased tuition fees have had on the attitudes and opinions of UK academic library staff towards their customers and their roles.

You have indicated that you are interesting in taking part in an interview as part of my project. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you understand what will be involved. Please read the following information carefully, and if you would like more information about this research project and what it involves, contact details are listed at the end of this letter.

- **Interview format:** The interview will be carried out in person and will follow a semi-structured format.
- **Duration:** The interview will last no more than an hour.
- **Recording:** If you consent to the interview being recorded, I will record it using a Dictaphone. However recording is not compulsory; if you would prefer not to be recorded please opt out on the attached consent form.
- **Questionnaire:** You will also be required to complete a short demographic questionnaire.
- **Withdrawal:** If at any point during the interview you wish to cease participation, you may do so immediately and will not be required to give a reason for your withdrawal.
- **Confidentiality:** To ensure confidentiality your name and the name of your institution will be disguised. All personal data will be removed from the interview transcripts and

any direct quotes included in the report will be assigned pseudonyms so that they cannot be linked to you or your institution.

- **Data security:** All the information you provide (including the interview transcript and recording if applicable) will be used in accordance with UK data protection legislation and destroyed once the dissertation has been marked.
- **Availability of the dissertation:** The completed dissertation will be submitted to the exam board of Aberystwyth University. A copy will subsequently be available in the university library, and may also be digitised for the institutional repository website (<http://cadair.aber.ac.uk/dspace>).
- **Debriefing:** If desired, a summary of the research findings will be sent to you.

If you have read the above information and are happy to be interviewed, please complete the attached consent form.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Many thanks,

Marion Harris.

My contact details:

Name: Marion Harris

Address: 2D Pepys Road, London, SE14 5SB

Email: [mph6@aber.ac.uk](mailto:mph6@aber.ac.uk)

Telephone: 07964 200 051

Contact details of my dissertation supervisor:

Name: Dr Judith Broady-Preston (Reader in Information Management, BA (Hons), MA, PhD, MCLIP, FHEA).

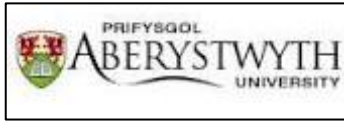
Address: Department of Information Studies, Aberystwyth University.

Email: [jbp@aber.ac.uk](mailto:jbp@aber.ac.uk)

Telephone: 01970 622185



*Appendix 3: Information letter to Library Managers at universities B and C*



**Information letter:  
Invitation to participate in an interview  
and request to carry out a focus group with your staff.**

[Date]

Dear [name],

My name is Marion Harris and I am studying for an MSc(Econ) in Information and Library Studies by distance learning with Aberystwyth University. As part of my MSc course I am conducting a dissertation project exploring what effect increased tuition fees have had on the attitudes and opinions of UK academic library staff towards their customers and their roles.

Part 1: Interview

You have indicated that you are interesting in taking part in an interview as part of my project. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you understand what will be involved. Please read the following information carefully, and if you would like more information about this research project and what it involves, contact details are listed at the end of this letter.

- **Interview format:** The interview will be carried out in person and will follow a semi-structured format.
- **Duration:** The interview will last no more than an hour.
- **Recording:** If you consent to the interview being recorded, I will record it using a Dictaphone. However recording is not compulsory; if you would prefer not to be recorded please opt out on the attached consent form.
- **Questionnaire:** You will also be required to complete a short demographic questionnaire.

- **Withdrawal:** If at any point during the interview you wish to cease participation, you may do so immediately and will not be required to give a reason for your withdrawal.
- **Confidentiality:** To ensure confidentiality your name and the name of your institution will be disguised. All personal data will be removed from the interview transcripts and any direct quotes included in the report will be assigned pseudonyms so that they cannot be linked to you or your institution.
- **Data security:** All the information you provide (including the interview transcript and recording if applicable) will be used in accordance with UK data protection legislation and destroyed once the dissertation has been marked.
- **Availability of the dissertation:** The completed dissertation will be submitted to the exam board of Aberystwyth University. A copy will subsequently be available in the university library, and may also be digitised for the institutional repository website (<http://cadair.aber.ac.uk/dspace>).
- **Debriefing:** If desired, a summary of the research findings will be sent to you.

If you have read the above information and are happy to be interviewed, please complete the attached consent form.

## Part 2: Focus group

As part of my research project I also plan to carry out focus groups with Library Assistants, to investigate whether library staff at different levels share the same perspectives on the topics in question. I would be grateful if you would allow me to hold a focus group with some of your Library Assistants. The arrangements would be as follows:

- **Participants:** I would like the focus group to involve around six participants; they must be Library Assistants who carry out customer-facing work for at least one hour a week.
- **Duration:** The focus group will last no longer than an hour.
- **Location:** If you agree to the focus group being carried out, I will liaise with you regarding an appropriate location.
- **Organisation:** If you agree to the focus group being carried out, I will send an email to the Library Assistants' mailing list requesting volunteers.
- **Consent:** If you agree to the focus group being carried out, I will send a separate information letter and consent form to the focus group participants.

If you are happy for me to carry out a focus group with your staff, please indicate this on the attached consent form.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Many thanks,

Marion Harris.

My contact details:

Name: Marion Harris

Address: 2D Pepys Road, London, SE14 5SB

Email: [mph6@aber.ac.uk](mailto:mph6@aber.ac.uk)

Telephone: 07964 200 051

Contact details of my dissertation supervisor:

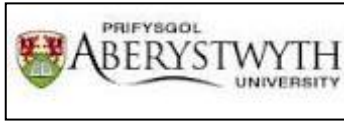
Name: Dr Judith Broady-Preston (Reader in Information Management, BA (Hons), MA, PhD, MCLIP, FHEA).

Address: Department of Information Studies, Aberystwyth University.

Email: [jbp@aber.ac.uk](mailto:jbp@aber.ac.uk)

Telephone: 01970 622185

*Appendix 4: Information letter to Library Assistants at universities B and C*



**Information letter:  
Invitation to participate in a focus group**

[Date]

Dear [name],

My name is Marion Harris and I am studying for an MSc(Econ) in Information and Library Studies by distance learning with Aberystwyth University. As part of my MSc course I am conducting a dissertation project exploring what effect increased tuition fees have had on the attitudes and opinions of UK academic library staff towards their customers and their roles.

You have indicated that you are interesting in taking part in a focus group as part of my project. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you understand what will be involved. Please read the following information carefully, and if you would like more information about this research project and what it involves, contact details are listed at the end of this letter.

- **Focus group format:** The focus group will involve six Library Assistants. I will act as a moderator to guide the discussion.
- **Duration:** The focus group will last no more than an hour.
- **Recording:** If you consent to the focus being recorded, I will record it using a Dictaphone. However recording is not compulsory; if you would prefer not to be recorded please opt out on the attached consent form.
- **Questionnaire:** You will also be required to complete a short demographic questionnaire.
- **Withdrawal:** If at any point during the focus group you wish to cease participation, you may do so immediately and will not be required to give a reason for your withdrawal.

- **Confidentiality:** To ensure confidentiality your name and the name of your institution will be disguised. All personal data will be removed from the focus group transcripts and any direct quotes included in the report will be assigned pseudonyms so that they cannot be linked to you or your institution.
- **Data security:** All the information you provide (including the focus group transcript and recording if applicable) will be used in accordance with UK data protection legislation and destroyed once the dissertation has been marked.
- **Availability of the dissertation:** The completed dissertation will be submitted to the exam board of Aberystwyth University. A copy will subsequently be available in the university library, and may also be digitised for the institutional repository website (<http://cadair.aber.ac.uk/dspace>).
- **Debriefing:** If desired, a summary of the research findings will be sent to you.

If you have read the above information and are happy to participate in the focus group, please complete the attached consent form.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Many thanks,

Marion Harris.

My contact details:

Name: Marion Harris

Address: 2D Pepys Road, London, SE14 5SB

Email: [mph6@aber.ac.uk](mailto:mph6@aber.ac.uk)

Telephone: 07964 200 051

Contact details of my dissertation supervisor:

Name: Dr Judith Broady-Preston (Reader in Information Management, BA (Hons), MA, PhD, MCLIP, FHEA).

Address: Department of Information Studies, Aberystwyth University.

Email: [jbp@aber.ac.uk](mailto:jbp@aber.ac.uk)

Telephone: 01970 622185

*Appendix 5: Interview guide*

<u>Research objective</u>	<u>Fixed questions</u>	<u>Topics to discuss</u>	<u>Probes</u>
1. To obtain library staff opinions about students being considered consumers.		Terms used to describe library users.	E.g. students, customers, readers, patrons.  Reasons for terms used?  Has this changed over time?
	There have been suggestions in the press that today's students view themselves as consumers, and have higher expectations than previous generations. How does your experience relate to this statement?		If so, examples?  E.g. different behaviour among students?  If so, how do you feel about this?
		Different perceptions of library's role e.g. "fee-paying" customer service, part of an educational establishment.	What is your opinion?  Have you experienced any conflict between these different approaches?

			Has this changed over time?
2. To explore whether Library Managers have implemented any changes to their services or strategy, as a result of the increased tuition fees.	Has your university (as a whole) responded to the tuition fees increase?		<p>If there have been changes of policy, examples?</p> <p>“Marketisation” idea.</p> <p>Relationship of library to the rest of the institution.</p>
	As a library manager, have your services and policies evolved in recent years?		<p>E.g. opening hours, rules and regulations, study spaces, communications.</p> <p>If there has been change, to what factors do you attribute this?</p> <p>Comparative influence of tuition fees vs. other factors? (e.g.</p>



			technological changes, e-resources, “Net Gen” students, diversification of student bodies, pedagogical changes).
		Performance measurement	<p>Methods used (e.g. NSS, Sconul surveys) and reasons for choices?</p> <p>Has this changed over time?</p> <p>Confidence in validity of measures</p> <p>Use of data gathered, time spent on this</p> <p>Comparative influence of user input and professional expertise on decision-making</p>

3. To discover whether library staff feel their roles and working life have been influenced by the increased tuition fees.	Has your role changed during the time you have held your position?		<p>If so, how?</p> <p>To what factors do you attribute this?</p> <p>How do you feel about this?</p>
4. To discover whether library managers are responsive to any impact the increased tuition fees have had on their staff.		<p>If they do feel that the tuition fees increase has affected their library, discuss impact on their staff.</p>	<p>What kind of impact?</p> <p>How have you responded, e.g. training?</p> <p>Has there been any changes in the skills library staff need?</p> <p>Communication with staff about design of services.</p>

	Are there any final comments you would like to make?		
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*Appendix 6: Focus group guide*

<u>Research objective</u>	<u>Fixed questions</u>	<u>Topics to discuss</u>	<u>Probes</u>
1. To obtain library staff opinions about students being considered consumers.		Terms used to describe library users.	E.g. students, customers, readers, patrons.  Reasons for terms used?  Has this changed over time?
	There have been suggestions in the press that today's students view themselves as consumers,		If so, examples?  E.g. different behaviour among

	and have higher expectations than previous generations. How does your experience relate to this statement?		students?  If so, how do you feel about this?
		Different perceptions of library's role e.g. "fee-paying" customer service, part of an educational establishment.	What is your opinion?  Have you experienced any conflict between these different approaches?  Has this changed over time?
3. To discover whether library staff feel their roles and working life have been influenced by the increased tuition fees.	How has your role changed during the time you have held your position?		If so, how? E.g. different services, policies, tasks.  To what factors do you attribute this?

			How do you feel about this?
4. To discover whether library managers are responsive to any impact the increased tuition fees have had on their staff.		If they do feel that the tuition fees increase has had an impact on them, discuss support from management to adapt to this.	<p>What kind of support? E.g. training.</p> <p>Is there any other kind of support that you would find helpful?</p> <p>Communication from management about design of services.</p>

## Demographic questionnaire

*Please complete the following information. Your responses will be confidential.*

Name: .....

Workplace: .....

Job title: .....

*For the following questions, please select from the options given by placing a tick in the appropriate box.*

1. How old are you? *Select one option.*

- ☐ 16-25
- ☐ 26-35
- ☐ 36-45
- ☐ 46-55
- ☐ 56-65
- ☐ 66 or older.

2. How long have you worked in the academic library sector (including your current job and previous jobs if applicable)? *Select one option.*

- ☐ Less than 1 year.
- ☐ 1-5 years.
- ☐ 6-10 years.
- ☐ 11-15 years.

- ☐ 16-20 years.
- ☐ 21 years or more.

3. What is the **highest** level of qualification you hold (in any subject)? *Select one option.*

- ☐ No formal qualifications.
- ☐ GCSE or equivalent.
- ☐ A level or equivalent.
- ☐ Bachelors degree or equivalent.
- ☐ Masters degree or equivalent.
- ☐ PhD or equivalent.
- ☐ Other. *Please specify* .....

4. Do you hold a qualification in a library or information-related field? *If so, please select the **highest** qualification held.*

- ☐ No.
- ☐ Yes – City and Guilds, NVQ or equivalent.
- ☐ Yes – Bachelors degree or equivalent.
- ☐ Yes – Postgraduate diploma or equivalent.
- ☐ Yes – Masters degree or equivalent.
- ☐ Yes – PhD or equivalent.
- ☐ Other. *Please specify* .....

## *Appendix 8: Example of a coded transcript*

*The following extract is taken from the interview with Library Manager B.*

Researcher: So the next question I've got is, kind of what you've already said, there have been suggestions in the press and in the media that today's students, they do view themselves in a customer sort of way, and they have higher expectations than maybe other generations did. How does that statement, sort of, relate to your experience?

LM-B: I think it reflects it quite accurately. I think many of today's... not all of them, but many of today's students do think they're customers, they do... certainly, I think they all have higher expectations, even if they're not the type of student who sees themselves simplistically as a customer (Theme 1a).

Researcher: Mm.

LM-B: [Pause] Because I think a lot of students do think what I think, that they have to put in work to get their degree. They do expect the institution to give them a lot, but they do realise that it is a partnership and they have to put something in. So I think even the ones who don't see themselves as customers still have higher expectations because they're borrowing more, they're going to come out with more debt, so they're investing more into the system...

Researcher: Yes.

LM-B: ... and so I think that's fair enough, really, that they should expect... an institution shouldn't say it's going to do something and not do it (Theme 1a). It shouldn't tolerate its staff not trying their best for the students, you know, on their side of the partnership. So that's... so that statement's accurate, I think.

Researcher: Yes. And could you give any particular examples, as you say, of the students'... perhaps different behaviours you might have seen?



LM-B: Um, well I think what I notice is probably slightly, um, what's the word? Less "in-your-face" than...

Researcher: That's why I'm going to be...

LM-B: Yes, exactly. I think the things I notice are around opening hours and expenditure on information resources.

Researcher: Yes.

LM-B: Those are the sort of high-level things where you notice that what... whatever you deliver, the students may... are then expecting the next thing.

Researcher: Yes.

LM-B: And they're more vociferous about it. (*Theme 1a*). I mean, I think something like, say, longer and longer opening hours has been around for a very long time.

Researcher: Yes.

LM-B: For easily the last 12 years, there's been benchmarking, and there's been, um, people increasing their hours, opening till later, opening at the weekends, and then [pause] opening even longer and opening 24 hours. All of those things have been around for a very long time, we first opened for... we reviewed our opening hours and opened for longer at the weekends 12 or 13 years ago. So long, long before there was...

Researcher: Yes, it's not a direct...

LM-B: No, there's always been that continuous improvement (*Theme 2d*), you know, sort of effort, but the students were less organised, you know, particularly think places like the Students' Union.

Researcher: Yes.

LM-B: They were less organised about wanting it (*Theme 1a*), so we used to do... we were aware, because you'd get comments, people saying "the weekend opening hours aren't very good", so we'd be aware and we'd be trying to push it a bit, and be liaising with the student's union, doing surveys and things, but in a way we were leading it...

Researcher: Right.

LM-B: ...rather than the students pressurising us. And now, I think... I don't actually think the students are leading it, because I think, particularly in libraries, actually, libraries have had a customer focus... I use the word "customer" focus... a user focus for a long, long time.

Researcher: Yes, it's important to remember that.

LM-B: One of the early parts of an institution like a university to have that, ahead of other bits of the university (*Theme 1c*). So I don't think the students are leading [pause] the drive to improve and continuously improve and do more for them, but I think they're much more organised about pushing for the same sorts of things. Um, so for last four or five years, again it precedes the £9,000 worth of fees, but there was a run up to those £9,000 worth of fees, and there was a lot of media attention around those, which...

Researcher: Yes.

LM-B: ... it kind of drove students to think about those... that they should get all sorts of things, ahead of them actually paying, some of them actually paying the £9,000 (*Theme 1a*). Um, so I think we work in much more of a partnership with the students' union now, so we're pushing for things, but they are pushing as well...

Researcher: Yes.

LM-B: ...and they have a lot of influence. More, sometimes, than perhaps they realise in an institution, because the institution wants to get good NSS results (*Theme 2c*).

## Consent form

**Title of project:** An investigation of the effect of increased tuition fees on the attitudes and opinions of UK academic library staff towards their customers and their roles.

**Name of student:** Marion Harris

**Name of supervisor:** Dr Judith Broady-Preston

**Project authority:** This research project is being undertaken as part of an MSc(Econ) in Information and Library Studies from Aberystwyth University.

- |  | Please<br>tick           |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the <i>Information Letter</i> dated [...]   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I have had the opportunity to consider this information and ask questions about it, and have had these answered satisfactorily.                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to take part in the above study.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I agree that the data I provide may be used by Marion Harris, within the conditions outlined in the <i>Information Letter</i> .                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I agree to the use of any anonymised direct quotes in the report.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I consent to my interview being recorded. <i>N.B. this is not compulsory.</i>   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. I would like to receive a summary of the research findings.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

<b>Name of participant</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Name of researcher</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>

**Please return this Consent Form to:**

Marion Harris  
 2 Pepys Road, London, SE14 5SB  
 Mph6@aber.ac.uk

## Consent form

**Title of project:** An investigation of the effect of increased tuition fees on the attitudes and opinions of UK academic library staff towards their customers and their roles.

**Name of student:** Marion Harris

**Name of supervisor:** Dr Judith Broady-Preston

**Project authority:** This research project is being undertaken as part of an MSc(Econ) in Information and Library Studies from Aberystwyth University.

- |   | <b>Please<br/>tick</b>   |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the <i>Information Letter</i> dated [...]  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 5. I agree that the data I provide may be used by Marion Harris, within the conditions outlined in the <i>Information Letter</i> .  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I agree to the use of any anonymised direct quotes in the report.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I consent to my interview being recorded. <i>N.B. this is not compulsory.</i>  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. In addition to participating in an interview, I give permission for Marion Harris to carry out a focus group with Library Assistants within my organisation. <i>N.B. this is not compulsory.</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

9. I would like to receive a summary of the research findings.

☐

<b>Name of participant</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Name of researcher</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>

**Please return this Consent Form to:**

Marion Harris

2 Pepys Road, London, SE14 5SB

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## Consent form

**Title of project:** An investigation of the effect of increased tuition fees on the attitudes and opinions of UK academic library staff towards their customers and their roles.

**Name of student:** Marion Harris

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- |  | <b>Please<br/>tick</b>   |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the <i>Information Letter</i> dated [...]   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I have had the opportunity to consider this information and ask questions about it, and have had these answered satisfactorily.                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to take part in the above study.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I agree that the data I provide may be used by Marion Harris, within the conditions outlined in the <i>Information Letter</i> .                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I agree to the use of any anonymised direct quotes in the report.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I consent to the focus group being recorded. <i>N.B. this is not compulsory.</i>  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. I would like to receive a summary of the research findings.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

<b>Name of participant</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Name of researcher</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>

**Please return this Consent Form to:**

Marion Harris  
 2 Pepys Road, London, SE14 5SB  
 Mph6@aber.ac.uk